



The great gateway of Pericles, leading to the Acropolis  
of Athens

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## NOTE

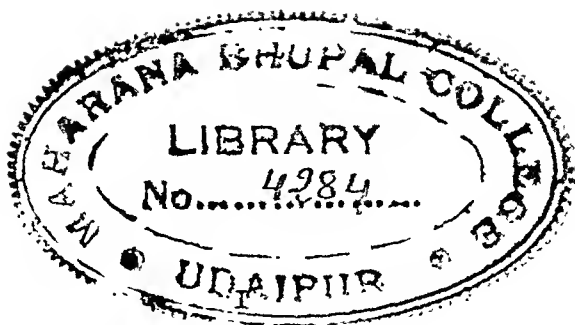
It may be well to point out that the sections on individual writers are arranged according to the order in which the Introductory Outline treats the categories under which they fall.

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G. N.



### *Introductory Outline*

GREEK literature possesses not only immense interest and importance, but also (despite the loss of great masses) very considerable bulk. It seems best, therefore, in a brief account like the present, firstly to provide a plan of the whole area, and secondly to add special sections upon the most famous writers.

Considered in its widest sense, Greek literature falls into five periods: the pre-Attic age, from (very roughly) 1000 to about 500 B. C.; the Attic (or Athenian) from 500 to 322, the year when Demosthenes and Aristotle died; the Alexandrian, from 322 to 100 B. C.; the Roman from 100 B. C. to A. D. 565 (the death of the Emperor Justinian); the Byzantine, from 565 to 1453, when the Turks captured Constantinople. There is attractiveness in a scheme which extends from the time of Solomon to a date little more than a century before Shakespeare; but it is in some ways misleading. The Byzantine age is only superficially Greek; in the preceding epoch excellent and valuable literature was produced, but much of it is not Greek in spirit and would have suffered little had it been written in Latin. The truth is that 'classical' Greek ceases at the death of Alexander (323 B. C.). His stupendous conquest threw the whole Middle East open to Hellenism: Greek kings reigned in Egypt, and Greek coins have been found in the Punjab. At the same moment Greece proper, subject to Macedonia, lost the springs of her vitality. Though admirable authors abound, there is no work which shows that spiritual authenticity, that tingling sense of reality, that power in writing to keep well-nigh miraculously close to the subject, which mark

the earlier literature. We shall, therefore, have more to say of the pre-Attic and Attic ages, less of the Alexandrian, little (considering its length) of the Roman, and shall ignore the Byzantine.

The earliest Greek author is also perhaps the greatest—Homer (section 2). But this is only an apparent miracle. There can be no doubt that ages of more rudimentary poetic endeavour preceded the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Two main proofs are : (i) these epics clearly include smaller independent lays ; (ii) their language contains strata of different periods and must have been slowly built up as a literary dialect. Besides these poems at which we merely guess, there existed in the Homeric age, and later, important epics which the Greeks attributed to Homer, and of which we possess fragments ; they were called the Epic Cycle. Perhaps the most important was the *Thebais*, dealing with the attack on Thebes by the Seven Champions ; it seems likely that, as the *Iliad* was the great secular epic of war, so the *Thebais* was the religious epic of war and influenced Aeschylus deeply. Certain minor works were attributed to Homer. The *Batrachomyomachia* (‘ Battle of the Frogs and Mice ’) is a brief mock-epic. *Margites*, now lost, depicted an amusing incompetent braggart : ‘ Many arts he knew, and all badly.’ The important *Hymns* are much later than the *Iliad* ; they are addressed to various deities, that to Hermes being an amusing and vigorous account of the god’s achievements in babyhood.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* may be dated very roughly indeed at 1000 B. C. Perhaps a century later appeared Hesiod, the farmer-poet of Boeotia. His *Works and Days* form an engrossing but heterogeneous book : there are definite instructions (e. g. for making a plough), a calendar for farmers and sailors, and ‘ moral ’ passages, including the celebrated Jar of Pandora and the Four Ages of Mankind—the Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron. Hesiod voices the dark side of that early period—the bitter poverty, the unlightened toil, which he seeks to alleviate by shrewd maxims :

‘Most of all, invite him that lives near thee; for if any mishap befalls in thy village, neighbours come ungirt, but kinsmen wait to gird themselves’ (343–5). The *Genealogy of the Gods*, less interesting to us, had perhaps more influence in Greece.

After any supreme literary achievement there is to be observed a bifurcation: second-rate people continue the form which has won success but which proves incapable of development; better writers strike out new lines, though they are no doubt influenced by the commanding genius preceding them. So, after the Homeric age, epic continued, but new types of poetry were appearing: the gnomic, the didactic, the iambic, the elegiac, the lyric. All this great body of work, so various in content and style, shows two characteristics: it is more reflective, and more individual, than Homer or even Hesiod.

Gnomic poetry is a collection of popular saws, often satiric; much of Hesiod is gnomic. Phocylides of Miletus (*fl.*<sup>1</sup> 537) is the best known of this school. ‘Seek a livelihood, and practise virtue when you have a living.’ ‘The Lerians are all bad, without exception, save Procles. And Procles is a Lerian.’ Didactic poetry is even more clearly derived from Hesiod, but the subject in this more reflective age is changed. The teachers of the Orphic religion used the hexameter, and though we have no early work, there is an extant collection of a later period. Some philosophers threw their teaching into the same mould. Xenophanes (*fl.* 538), half theologian, half philosopher, censured Homer and Hesiod for ascribing human sins to the gods. ‘There is one God, among gods and men the greatest, all eye, all thought, all ear.’ His pupil, the celebrated Parmenides, wrote two books on his own difficult metaphysics, the remains of which are, as literature, desperately dull. But the Sicilian Empedocles (*fl.* 445) is a genuine poet: his fragments have colour and sometimes startling intensity.

<sup>1</sup> i. e. *floruit* (‘flourished’)—the date at which a man is supposed to have been at the height of his activity.

The elegiac metre, which places a pentameter after each hexameter, was employed for subjects more emotional, yet not emotional enough for lyrics. Most of the early elegiac poetry, therefore, is hortatory or argumentative, and corresponds to the speeches in Homer. Callinus of Ephesus (about 650) is the earliest, and wrote to encourage his countrymen in war. Similarly Tyrtæus encouraged the Spartans against Messenia, Solon (639-559) urged the Athenians to the conquest of Salamis, Theognis (sixth century), a Megarian noble, inveighed bitterly against the democrats of his city. But the range of topics widened. Mimnermus of Colophon is known to Horace as the poet *par excellence* of love and jest. Theognis, whose remains are the most extensive of all, has much gnomic as well as political matter. Solon is no great poet, but his writings are of deep interest as the first-hand discussion, by one of the world's greatest legislators, of his work and purpose.

Iambic poetry shows no particular relationship to the epic, though conceivably it was affected by *Margites*. Archilochus (*fl.* 650) was one of the greatest poets. His fragments tingle in every word and seem astringent on the lips even to-day. He was a vehement, restless, heart-eating genius like Sappho: 'Seven corpses on the earth, and we haled them by the foot—a thousand murderers we.' This power, and his lithe direct iambic metre, made him famous as a satirist; it is said that when Lycambes broke off his daughter's engagement with Archilochus, the poet lampooned them so bitterly that they hanged themselves.

Under lyric poetry are grouped all forms necessarily sung to music, whether by one person or by a company. We possess a few popular ditties. The charming *chelidonisma*, or Swallow-Song, was sung by the boys of Rhodes as they went from door to door in spring begging gifts of cake and the like—the Greek equivalent of Christmas-carols. Among the *scolia* or drinking-songs was that in honour of Harmodius and Aristogiton, whom the Athenians

regarded as founders of the democracy ; it was a kind of Athenian National Anthem. The most celebrated writers of personal song were Sappho, Alcaeus, and Anacreon. Sappho, perhaps the greatest love-poet of all time, is discussed later (section 3). Alcaeus (*fl.* 600) is one of the most attractive figures in literature. His life was filled with foreign war, strife in his native Lesbos, travel, revelry, love, and song. One of his vivid fragments describes his armoury ; another welcomes ' from the ends of earth ' his brother who took service in Babylon and slew in single combat a foe seven feet three inches high. Anacreon of Teos (sixth century) was a master of love-poetry ; one splendid fragment (the Foal of Thrace) is unsurpassed for tenderness and virile passion. But Anacreon's repute has met curious mischance : most of the poems which go under his name are many centuries later and are pretty bits of confectionery which represent the poet as an amorous tippling dotard.

The earliest composer of songs for ' choruses ' was Alcman (650), a Spartan, though the amazingly beautiful remains show nothing of the traditional Spartan stiffness. The longest passage is from a *parthenion*, or song for girls. Another is addressed to such a company : ' No longer, ye maidens of honeyed utterance, voices of passion, can my limbs bear me ; ah, would I were a kingfisher that flits with halcyons over the blossom of the wave, bearing a blithe heart, the sea-blue bird of spring ! ' These four intoxicatingly lovely lines are ostensibly in the Homeric metre, but Alcman with superb skill has given an utterly different tone by using dactyls for spondees everywhere save in the last foot of each verse. The lightness and speed thus gained, joined to the fancifulness of the conception and the choice of words, make the passage lyric ; the change goes on before our eyes in these masterly hands. Stesichorus (600), from Himera in Sicily, was of the first importance for his treatment of myth ; his spacious lyrics were largely narrative, and many divergences of Aeschylus from stories

found in Homer are to be ascribed to versions which he found in Stesichorus. Ibycus of Rhegium (540) has left some rich and vigorous fragments, for instance the marvellous 'now bright sleepless dawn awakens the nightingales'. This imaginative loveliness, found also in Sappho and Alcman, fades somewhat in the great Attic period when the advance of intellect and the preoccupations of religion, ethics, and politics dominated art. We may see the working of this Attic spirit already in Simonides of Ceos (556-468). The loveliness is still present, but it is the loveliness of exquisite silver-work, not the 'gold, ivory, and coral' which Pindar in a moment of ecstasy proclaims. Simonides is perhaps the world's greatest master of simple beauty. By a splendid chance, his maturity coincided with the Persian invasions, and the glorious exploits of Greek soldiers were commemorated in worthy epitaphs. That written for the Dead of Thermopylae was looked on throughout antiquity as the expression of Sparta's soul: 'Stranger, announce to the Lacedaemonians that in obedience to their words we lie here.' The lines depicting Danae and her babe afloat in the carven chest upon the midnight sea are a wonder of tenderness and pity. Simonides' nephew, Bacchylides, is pleasant but mediocre. The line of great lyrists ends with Pindar (section 4), whose *Triumphal Odes* we possess entire, together with many fragments belonging to other classes, such as dirges and paeans.

The fifth and fourth centuries before Christ are called the Athenian Period, not only because most of the great literature was written by Athenians, but also because the Athenian spirit—that is, the threefold passion for Reason, Beauty, and the State—is imprinted on the art of those centuries. So it was that Athenians developed tragedy, the greatest literary form of all. In their hands it voiced that triple passion, and if we follow this thought we see why some earlier excellences are forfeited: Achilles in the *Iliad* is selfish at the expense of the community; the loveliness of



Alcman or Ibycus is a personal joy, contrasted so with the most exquisite songs of the tragedians, which are attached to the national life and land—the nation's woe in *Agamemnon*, the village of Colonus in Sophocles, the Attic countryside in *Medea*.

Tragedy arose, Aristotle tells us, 'from those who led the dithyramb.' At first there was a purely choric celebration of the god Dionysus; then Thespis or Arion (the tradition varies) made one performer declaim narrative in the pauses of the lyric performance. Aeschylus introduced a second actor, thus creating drama as we understand it, and Sophocles a third. A fourth actor was rarely employed. Gradually the length and importance of the lyrics dwindled, while the episodes became longer and more vital. The tragedies were acted in the vast open-air theatre of Dionysus on the south-east slope of the Acropolis. Three poets were selected to compete for the prize; each produced a set of four plays—three tragedies and a satyric play. This last was a half-heroic drama, whose chorus was always formed of satyrs, the bestial attendants of Dionysus.

The earliest great tragic poet was Phrynichus, whose first victory occurred about 510 B. C. Probably his works were operas rather than dramas. His *Taking of Miletus* and *The Phoenician Women* were celebrated, and his songs continued in high favour throughout the fifth century. Aeschylus (section 5) combines lyrical beauty, splendour of tragic conception, and religious profundity. Sophocles (section 6) is usually regarded as the greatest ancient playwright; though his lyrics, dialogue, and characterization are alike magnificent, his most striking—certainly his most original—merit lies in plot-construction. Euripides (section 7) is inferior to Aeschylus in grandeur, to Sophocles in equipoise; his outstanding excellence is alertness of mind and interest, by virtue of which he appealed to later Greece far more than his rivals. After Euripides tragedy rapidly lost vigour. Agathon, his friend, sought to give it fresh life by experiments, such as evolving imaginary plot instead of

using the legends ; he had no marked success. The same thing happened which we noted as occurring after Homer. While the great original minds turned to the development of comedy and prose, second-rate men continued tragedy for many generations. We still possess *The Passion of Christ*, wrongly attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus (fourth century), a deplorable patchwork of shreds from Euripides joined together by bad late verses.

The early history of Comedy is obscure because official recognition came to it later than to tragedy. In Attica it arose from the phallic songs and dances at vintage-time. The Old Comedy was marked by political satire, lyric beauty, and indecency. Its first exponent of genius was the 'bull-eating' Cratinus, who corresponded roughly to Aeschylus. He was patronized by Aristophanes in the *Knights* as a fine poet ruined by drink ; in reply he produced the *Pytine* ('Flask') and defeated his assailant. Eupolis seems analogous to Sophocles and was regarded as the poet of 'charm' ; he collaborated in the *Knights*. Aristophanes (section 8) corresponds to Euripides, though he attacked the tragedian incessantly. The New Comedy was a brilliant and important chapter in literary history ; unfortunately we have not a single complete play belonging thereto. Euripides, as the recently discovered *Life* by Satyrus mentions, is the origin of this type of comedy, which depicts contemporary manners with love-interest and no trace of Aristophanic vigour or grossness. Menander (342-291) was its great poet, of whom we have always possessed many fragments, mostly single lines of facile elegant diction and epigrammatic brilliance ; considerable portions of a few comedies have been found in our time. The Romans, Plautus and Terence, used the New Comedy as a storehouse of plots ; from these again Molière gained much, and from Molière our own Comedy of Manners.

Prose, in the three departments of philosophy, history, and oratory, flourished gloriously during these two 'Athenian' centuries. Even earlier the philosophers Anaximander (*fl.* 570)

and Anaximenes (*fl.* 550) had written down their doctrines in 'prose', but their remains have no literary merit. Heraclitus of Ephesus (*fl.* 500) is more striking in this regard as in his philosophy—the famous teaching that Fire is the primal element, and that all things are in flux. The fragments of his book on Nature are filled with a darkly rich splendour of almost sinister wisdom and oracular power, reminding one of Tacitus and Carlyle. Anaxagoras (*fl.* 460) came from Clazomenae to Athens and first made that city a centre of philosophy, teaching that Mind is the first cause of order in the Universe. Hippocrates (*fl.* 430) of Cos, the greatest physician of antiquity, has philosophic breadth and grasp: 'Nothing is more divine, or more human, than anything else.' Democritus (420) of Abdera in Thrace expounded the Atomic Theory. Plato



HIPPOCRATES

(section 9) is beyond question the greatest prose-author of Greece, and as a philosopher immensely superior to his predecessors. Nevertheless he owes much to them: his system is a magnificent synthesis of earlier doctrines. On the literary side he was led by the example of the mime-writers Epicharmus and Sophron to adopt the dialogue-form, and his mastery of prose-style was in some degree due to the teaching of Gorgias and his Athenian followers. Plato's pupil Aristotle (section 10) is great as a philosopher, and as a scientist undoubtedly first

among the ancients. His work at the Lyceum was continued by smaller men, among whom Theophrastus is eminent, not only for his work on botany, but for his famous *Characters*. Aristotle's *Ethics* give us the science of morals; Theophrastus composed brilliant little sketches of typical people—the Boastful Man, the Superstitious Man, the Man of Petty Ambition who 'takes his son to Delphi to get his hair cut'. This kind of work, superficial though often amusing, is characteristic of the later age and has more kinship with Lucian than with Aristotle.

In history the first great name is that of Herodotus (section 11) who produced a long and fascinating work, part history, part delightful anecdotes, part geography, part folklore. Though he belongs in time to the Athenian age and had close connexion with Athens, he is an Ionian and uses that dialect. The contemporary drama influences him, so that he tends to make great historical events hang upon the character or purpose of individuals. Homer too has a strong effect, so that his pages are more full of colour and movement than those of more contemplative historians. Thucydides (section 12) is acknowledged by all as the greatest of ancient historians. His style is often magnificent but often also curt, involved, and obscure, especially in the speeches: the study of composition fostered by the Sophists clearly affects him, but its results are uneven. Xenophon (section 13), a charming, versatile, but comparatively mediocre writer, continued Thucydides' history in the *Hellenica* and wrote numerous other works, including the *Anabasis*, which related the Retreat of the Ten Thousand and opened the eyes of Greece to the possibility of a successful attack upon the Persian Empire.

Oratory was bound up with what Athenians called 'sophistic'. A sophist was a man who understood, could systematize and teach, the subjects of a 'liberal' education. The ideas always suggested by the word in the Attic age were expertness, teaching power, 'superiority'. The most celebrated subject was rhetoric,

and Athenian prose as an art-form is due originally to the rhetorical teaching of sophists and in particular of Gorgias. The study of rhetoric had been founded in Sicily by Corax (about 460), and in 427 Gorgias was sent by his native city Leontini on an embassy to Athens. There he taught, with rapid and notable success. But the Athenians were no slavish copyists. Gorgias was florid and affected ; the Attic orators in their different degrees are comparatively chaste and uncoloured. But the Sicilian taught them how to construct a sentence with symmetry. The chief orators are Isocrates, a professional speech-writer and pamphleteer who sought to unite Greece in a crusade against Persia, and whose flexible symmetrical elegance has done much to model the eloquence of Cicero and the moderns ; Isaeus, a great authority on jurisprudence ; Aeschines, the inveterate antagonist of Demosthenes and a master of coloured rhetoric ; Demosthenes himself (section 14), incomparably the greatest Greek orator, who surpasses Cicero in vigour, Burke in trenchancy.

Another literary form, the essay, begins in the fifth century. Isocrates was more pamphleteer than orator (he never spoke in public). Much earlier, Ion of Chios the tragedian composed *belles lettres*, for example an interesting account of distinguished visitors (among them Sophocles) to his native island. Among Xenophon's works was mistakenly included a *Constitution of Athens* written (in Xenophon's childhood) by an Athenian oligarch who describes the democracy with strong dislike but excellent insight.

The Alexandrian Age covers roughly the third and second centuries before Christ. Under the Ptolemies Alexandria became the chief centre of Greek literature, as of commerce. But ' Alexandrian ' is a name applied to all writers of this time, though some worked in Cos, Athens, or Byzantium ; it implies learning, sophistication, elaborate elegance, derivative art. The great comic playwright Menander has been mentioned already. Tragedy

Pythagoreanism and so with Eastern systems—Plato is ‘Moses talking Attic’. Plotinus (204–70), the greatest Neo-Platonist, taught for twenty-six years in Rome; his teaching was drawn up by Porphyry in the *Enneads*, six groups containing nine books each. Plotinus carried the transcendentalism of Plato to its conceivable extreme: Porphyry says ‘he seemed ashamed that he had a body’. Nothing could better exemplify the decay of the Greek spirit. From this earthly environment the Neo-Platonists strove to escape by ‘ecstasy’, a process of leaving oneself behind and so attaining to God, who is not merely outside matter but outside thought. Julian (331–63), the ‘Apostate’ Emperor, spent his short career in war and in desperate attempts to repress Christianity by writing in championship of Hellenism. Hypatia, who taught Neo-Platonism in Alexandria and was torn to pieces by the Christian mob, is best known to us in Kingsley’s brilliant novel.

informant about the early European world, we must prefer him even to Aristotle and Cicero. He had immense industry and a splendid power of admiration. His great work is the famous *Lives*, in which he sets side by side a Greek and a Roman—e.g. Alexander and Caesar, Alcibiades and Coriolanus—adding a comparison. It would be difficult to name any secular work, by however great an author, which has so widely, strongly, and directly affected modern men. The rest of his writings are known as the *Moralia*, a great collection of essays on religion, morals, literature, music, and other topics. Lucian (125?-90?) is amazingly able, witty, and facile, in some ways resembling brilliant Jewish writers of our own time, such as Mr. Beerbohm. He has contemporary and earlier culture at his fingers' ends, and uses the old ideas, the old literature, as material for light, satirical, utterly disillusioned essays, stories, and dialogues. These latter, his Imaginary Conversations, particularly *Dialogues of the Dead*, are his best-known work. Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote literary essays and letters at Rome during the last quarter of a century before Christ. The greatest critical work of antiquity, *On the Sublime*, wrongly attributed to Longinus, was perhaps composed late in the first century of our era. It is a thoroughly 'modern' and brilliant treatment of the means to elevation in style, and shows catholic reading: one of the examples is from Genesis ('Let there be light; and there was light'). Dio Chrysostom (born about A. D. 40) is an attractive essayist of wide scope: one of his best pieces compares the three plays on Philoctetes written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; another is a charming account of pastoral life in Euboea. Geography is represented by Strabo (60 B. C.?-A. D. 25?) and antiquarian travel by Pausanias, who wrote his *Description of Greece* about A. D. 170. Several important works of reference must be named. Julius Pollux, tutor of Commodus (afterwards Emperor), compiled the *Onomasticon* for his instruction. Harpocration made a lexicon of the Ten

## *Homer*

THE name 'Homer' is still used as a convenient term for the author or authors of the two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But nothing whatever is known concerning these early poets: instead of biography, we find the 'Homeric Question'—that is, the problem of the time and place at which the two poems were made, and the manner in which they assumed their present shape.

Only two definite facts may be regarded as certain. First, 'Homer' was by law recited in Athens at the Panathenaic festival. This law may have been the work of the despot Pisistratus, who died in 527. Second, for generations before that time the poems had been well known throughout Greece, selected portions or episodes being sung in public by 'rhapsodes'. Did one poet compose the two epics? If so, when? Did one write the *Iliad*, another the *Odyssey*? Or is each built up by a master out of separate pre-existing lays? Or was there a large nucleus of each, to which smaller portions were later attached? Which are the later portions? Why, when, and where did they come into being? In what dialect or dialects of Greek were these various works composed? So many theories have been put forward that it would be difficult to offer even a vague account which would command general assent. Perhaps there would be least objection to the following statement. An *Iliad*, telling of Achilles' wrath and its appeasement, was composed something like one thousand years before Christ; its bulk was afterwards increased by episodes not vitally connected with the original theme. Later, an *Odyssey*, or tale of Odysseus' return home from Troy, came into existence and was enlarged by other narratives, especially the journey of his son Telemachus in search of him. At Athens the two poems were given a fixed form, and the language was in some degree Atticized.



That these epics, however each grew, are growths of two different epochs, seems certain. This view was known even in ancient times : in the Alexandrian Age it was held by scholars called the Separatists (*chorizontes*). Some differences are fundamental. Throughout the *Iliad* (save for the actual reminiscences of Nestor and other old men) we move in a glorious present. The *Odyssey* is pervaded by a reflective air—we seem to have got *past* things : the Tale of Troy is now history. It is no real answer that as the subject has changed the manner must be different. For not only do we find gardens instead of battles, sea and islands instead of camps and Trojan streets ; when we do meet bloodshed in the *Odyssey* the tone has altogether changed. The Slaying of the Suitors is an execution performed by a sorely-tried householder, whereas the feats of Achilles or Diomedes before Troy are full of ‘ the bloom and the beauty, the splendour of spears ’. The gods, too, are different. In the *Iliad*, many of them come to earth frequently as belligerents or counsellors ; their home is the known mountain Olympus. Throughout the *Odyssey*, Olympus is no mountain but some more remote region, and the intervention of gods is practically confined to the enmity of Poseidon against Odysseus and Athena’s encouragement of that hero and his son. Magic, almost unknown in the earlier epic, is a marked element in the later : the marvellous herbs, lotus, moly, the drugs and wand of Circe, the nepenthe administered by Helen to Telemachus, the miraculous Phaeacian vessel, the invisibility or transformation of Odysseus. Nor can we mistake the changed attitude towards common folk. The *Iliad* makes of them an anonymous background : Thersites and Dolon are the only names. But Eumaeus the swineherd is important in the latter half of the *Odyssey* ; Irus the braggart beggar provides a striking episode ; the men of Odysseus’ crew are important to his fortunes through their loyalty, fears, folly, and claim upon his care. Finally, the *Iliad* is pervaded by a sense of the mightiness of

passion, the *Odyssey* by a sense of moral values. The treachery of Pandarus is actually instigated by gods (*Iliad*, iv. 86-104), but the Suitors have no deity on their side.

Each epic contains twenty-four books; the *Iliad* has 15,693 lines, the *Odyssey*, 12,110. Both poems are concerned with the Tale of Troy. Paris, son of Priam, the Trojan king, having taken Helen from Sparta, her husband Menelaus and his brother



THE WALLS OF TROY

Agamemnon gathered a great host from the whole of Greece and sailed to bring her back and punish Troy. They besieged the city for ten years, and, after Achilles, the greatest of the Greeks, and Hector, the champion of Troy, had fallen, they succeeded by means of the Wooden Horse which, filled with warriors, was by a trick sent inside the walls. The *Iliad* relates the Wrath of Achilles and is confined to certain events in the tenth year of the siege—how Achilles quarrelled with Agamemnon and refused to fight, how the Greeks were therefore beaten by the Trojans till Achilles in grief for the death of his friend Patroclus took the

field again, and how he slew Hector.' The *Odyssey* tells the adventures of Odysseus (Ulysses) after the sack of Troy : his ten years' wandering on his way home to Ithaca, and the events on that island, culminating in the destruction of the princes who wooed his wife Penelope and wasted his goods.

It will be useful to indicate some of the most striking passages. In the third *Iliad* occurs the View from the Wall, where Priam and the elders assembled on the Trojan ramparts are visited by Helen, who is asked by the king to identify certain figures in the Greek host. This is the occasion for a notable description of Agamemnon, Odysseus, and others, after which Helen continues (234-44) :

Clearly the rest I behold of the dark-eyed sons of Achaia,  
Known to me well are the faces of all ; their names I remember ;  
Two—two only remain, whom I see not among the commanders,  
Castor fleet in the car, Polydeuces brave with the cestus—  
Own dear brethren of mine—one parent loved us as infants.  
Are they not here in the host, from the shores of loved Lacedaemon,  
Or, though they came with the rest in ships that bound through  
the waters,

Dare they not enter the fight or stand in the council of Heroes,  
All for fear of the shame and taunts my crime has awakened ?

So said she ;—long since they in Earth's soft arms were reposing,  
There, in their own dear land, their Fatherland, Lacedaemon.<sup>1</sup>

The Fifth Book relates the *aristeia*, or martial outbreak, of Diomedes, in which after terrific slaughter of Trojans he wounds Aphrodite and even Ares, the war-god himself. The remarkable feature about such exploits in Homer is that they do not really strike one as miraculous, which would spoil them, but as human, however glorious. For, firstly, Diomedes' attacks are suggested by a goddess, Athena. Secondly, when he ventures upon Apollo, a greater god than Ares, he is sternly rebuked.

'Valiant Diomedes rushed upon Aeneas, knowing that Apollo held his hands over him ; but he dreaded not even the great god,

<sup>1</sup> Hawtreys translation.

striving ever to kill Aeneas and strip the fair armour from him. Thrice then did he charge, eager to slay, and thrice did Apollo smite back his gleaming shield. But when for the fourth time he leaped forward like an immortal, with dread rebuke far-darting Apollo addressed him: "Beware, son of Tydeus, and retire! Seek not to equal the gods in spirit, for men that walk upon the ground have no kinship with deathless gods" (v. 432-42).

There are many other great battle-scenes, especially the terrific combat (xvii. 262-425) over the body of Patroclus, when the chieftains on each side battle in mysterious gloom, while 'the other Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans fought tranquilly beneath open sky', and the scenes where Ajax the Greater, who always shows a faint delightful touch of Shakespeare's 'beef-witted lord', acquits himself so magnificently single-handed, at one time (xi. 544-65) alone among Trojans and heart-benumbed by Zeus himself, yet retreating full slowly, like an ass that has invaded a cornfield and is laboriously beaten out again by lads with cudgels. Perhaps there is in the world's literature no passage to equal in terror and rapidity the scene (xii. 445-66) where Hector bursts open the gates of the Greek wall and leaps within.

'And Hector snatched up a stone which lay before the gates, broad at the base, pointed above. To heave it from earth onto a waggon were not easy for two men, strongest in their village, as men are now; but he single-handed tossed it lightly. As a shepherd lightly carries the fleece of a ram, taking it in one hand, little troubled by its weight, so did Hector lift and bear the stone straight to the timbers which closed the lofty double gates, fitted close and strong; two bars criss-cross held them within, and a single peg in the socket. Going close he stood, and with full force smote them in the midst, straddling to give power to his missile, and burst both hinges. Inside fell the stone weightily, loudly shrieked the gates, the bars held not, and the timbers were shattered into flying flinders by the rushing stone. In he leaped, glorious Hector, glaring like swift night, blazing with the terrible bronze that clad his flesh, and grasping two spears. None that crossed

his path when he leaped within the gates, his eyes on flame, none save gods could have stayed him.'

That so long a poem, ostensibly concerned throughout with fighting, should be the very reverse of monotonous—it is one of the three works which Dr. Johnson said everyone regrets to finish—results not only from the peerless beauty and power of the verse, but even more from the poet's inexhaustible resource in providing other topics which, though relevant, are of quite different tone. Thus, when Achilles' armour is taken from the corpse of Patroclus by Hector, other weapons are forged by the divine smith Hephaestus, and so we find the celebrated Shield of Achilles (xvii. 478–608), whereon are embossed scenes of ploughing, a lawsuit, a dance, and the like. The funeral of Patroclus is the occasion for exciting athletic contests (xxiii. 257–897). The Ninth Book contains the Embassy to Achilles. Since the Greeks, through his abstention from battle, have been worsted, Agamemnon humbles himself and sends to Achilles three envoys—Ajax the blunt and simple, Odysseus the crafty, Phoenix the aged adviser of Achilles. Much splendid and moving eloquence is found in their differing appeals and his courteous but passionate replies. More remote from the spirit of war is the Deception of Zeus (xiv), where Hera cajoles the king of the gods into love-passages which prevent his observing the help given against his behest by Poseidon to the Greeks. A far different love-scene is the immortal Farewell of Hector and his wife Andromache (vi. 390–502). She bursts forth into an agony of tenderness and fear that his own valour will destroy him; he consoles her with manly love and resolution, stretching forth his arms for his baby son, but the child shrinks back, affrighted by the brazen helmet and the horse-hair plume. Hector unhelms and, taking his child, prays the gods to make the boy far greater than his sire, while the mother 'smiles through her tears'. Every one who reads through the *Iliad* takes away, despite the immense bloodshed and ferocity, a sense not of horror but of

pungent humanity. This impression reaches its climax in the Ransom of Hector (xxiv). Achilles, having slain Hector, refuses burial to the corpse, which every day he drags at his chariot-wheels round the tomb of Patroclus. Priam, the aged father of Hector, goes by night to the Greek camp, bearing gifts as ransom, and penetrates unseen to the hut of Achilles. The interview between these two sorely-tried men is the most magnificent picture ever painted of splendid nobility, breeding, courtesy in a terrible situation; for we are to remember that Achilles' grief for Patroclus has all but unhinged his soul. Forbearance, self-control, sympathy—there is small tradition of these for Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans. But for these two noble princes they are real enough, and only enough, to overpower the natural, the immemorial ferocity of bitter grief and resentment. This terrible oscillation between humanity and savagery is perhaps the most touching, the most masterly, achievement in the whole *Iliad*.

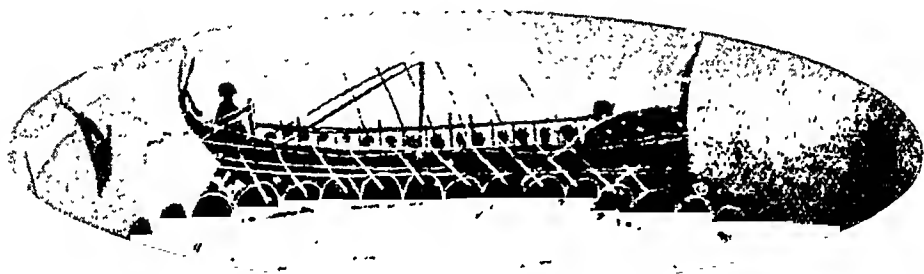
Another means to variety is the use of similes. Most poets have employed such figures to enforce and irradiate the act or scene to which they refer. In the *Iliad* they carry us away from it, refreshing the mind by a momentary distraction, and seldom corresponding in details to the original fact. Paris rushing through Troy to battle is compared (vi. 506-11) to a stalled horse full-fed at the manger, which breaks its chain and with head high, mane flowing, gallops over the plain to the feeding-ground of the mares. There is but one similarity—eager confident speed; and the examples of this type are almost innumerable. The similes of the *Iliad* show, in fact, highly sophisticated art: the poet has undertaken to sing of battles, but ingeniously refreshes his hearer by sudden glimpses of other life and activity. So in Flemish sacred pictures an artist duly portrays the Virgin and her Child, but sets in the background a little gleaming window through which, if we draw near, we may espy the gables of Bruges or Haarlem, and microscopic Dutchwomen on the way to market.

In the *Odyssey*, exciting passages are less common, the general tone being a quiet portrayal of life and less heroic people; the violence is mostly the violence of Nature or of non-human creatures. Penelope's suitors behave ill, but their standard of violence is childish after those hurricanes of the *Iliad*. The first notable episode is the story (iv. 351-570) told at leisurely length by Menelaus to his visitors Telemachus and young Pisistratus, how he consulted Proteus of Egypt, 'the unerring old man of the sea' who shepherded seals instead of sheep and changed himself into various elusive shapes. In Book v we read of Odysseus' parting with Calypso—a romantic picture of the island far from the haunts of men and gods, its poplars and pines towering to Heaven, and the Wanderer felling them to make his boat, with no creature for his companion save the mysterious Nymph; then come his embarkation and voyage, his shipwreck far from land, his escape by favour of the sea-spirit Ino, who gives him her veil as support while he swims for two days and nights; lastly the vivid account of his attempt to land on the rocky shore, till he finds a welcoming river-mouth.

While Odysseus sleeps in utter weariness beneath the bushes, naked save for his coverlet of fallen leaves, the princess Nausicaa, daughter of the Phaeacian king, comes down to the shore with her maidens in order to wash clothes. Work over, the girls are playing at ball, and an excited scream from one of them awakens Odysseus, who comes forward to ask aid, screening himself with a leafy branch. The other girls run away in fright, but Nausicaa stands her ground and with perfect self-possession and breeding converses with the naked suppliant. Later she leads him into the city and instructs him how to gain the protection of her royal parents. We hardly hear again of this perfect figure of maidenly discretion and dignity; for once we bear a grudge against an immortal poet. He is clearly using a simple and delightful story, how an utterly indigent but glorious Stranger from the sea met and married the

daughter of a wealthy king ; but the plan of the whole epic forbids such an end—the little story melts away into nothing.

To King Alcinous and his court Odysseus tells the celebrated tale of his adventures after leaving Troy (Books ix–xii). Best known, perhaps, is the story of the Cyclops, the one-eyed gigantic shepherd who devoured Odysseus' companions two by two until the survivors blinded him with a red-hot stake and escaped by stratagem from the cave at whose mouth he sat fumbling for them. Odysseus tied the sheep together by threes and beneath the



A MEDITERRANEAN VESSEL

(Metropolitan Museum of New York)

middle beast fastened a man. He himself escaped last, having no one to secure him and clutching with feet and hands the thick fleece of a great ram, which staggered forth after its companions, so provoking from the Cyclops his quaint and touching address (ix. 447–55) :

‘Pet ram, why, prithee, dost thou thus move through the cave, of all my sheep the last? On former days thou didst not thus move laggardly behind the flock. . . . Can it be that thou sorrowest for thy master’s eye, whom a villain, with his dire comrades, blinded after quelling my heart with wine—even Noman, who (I trow) hath not yet escaped doom?’

After the visit to Aeolus, lord of the winds, upon his floating island, and the brief but terrible encounter with the murderous



non, Ajax, and Achilles, who utters to him words more famous than any others in the poem :

‘ Nay, goodly Odysseus, speak not comfortingly of death to me. Rather would I be a hind that is serf to some landless man of scant livelihood, than be king over all them that are dead and gone ’ (xi. 488-91).

Later he beholds the famous sinners, Tityos torn by vultures, Tantalus mocked by elusive food and drink, Sisyphus pushing his pitiless stone. Last of all is the phantom of Heracles.

The beautiful story of the Sirens (xii. 165-200) is notable for the same appeal as was observed a moment ago.

‘ Come hither, renowned Odysseus, high glory of the Greeks ! Stay thy ship to hear our voice ; for never yet hath any man travelled past this spot in his black ship till he has heard the honied utterance of our lips. Aye, after taking delight he goes, and wider knowledge. For we know all—whatever laborious Greeks and Trojans by will of the gods endured in spacious Troy. We know all things that pass upon earth.’

The appeal is to his thirst for knowledge—not a universal appeal, as later use of the name ‘ siren ’ proves. Round them, we read, lay the bones of earlier mariners whom they had destroyed, and it may be imagined that the temptation was worded to fit the ruling passion of each. That such a thought was not too ‘ modern ’ for the poet is shown by a marvellous passage much earlier in the epic (iv. 265-89). Menelaus reminds Helen of the night after the Wooden Horse was brought into Troy. She suspected that warriors were concealed within it.

‘ Thrice didst thou walk round the hollow ambush, passing thy hands over it and naming severally the Greek chieftains, *imitating the voice of each man’s wife*. . . . Then all the other sons of the Achaeans were silent ; Anticlus alone wished to answer thee, but Odysseus with strong hands pressed his mouth unceasingly and saved the Greeks, holding him until Pallas Athene drew thee away.’

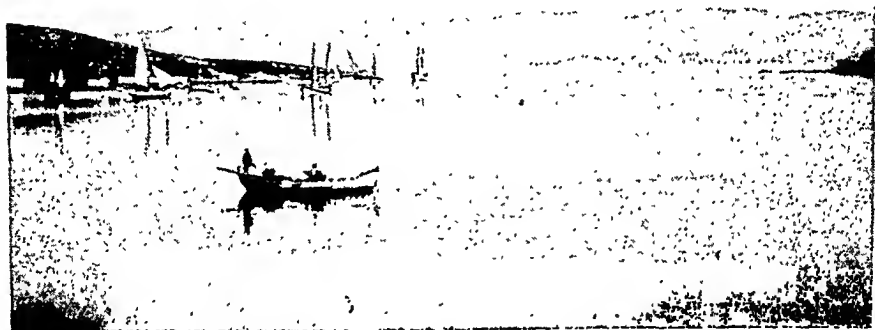
During one of the long conversations between Odysseus and Eumæus the latter tells how he became a slave (xv. 403-84). It is an amazingly quiet and poignant story of real life in the Early Mediterranean world, a story which for a moment makes the tale of Circe or the Cyclops seem childish babble. To a quiet happy country came Phœnician merchants, who during their sojourn met and seduced a woman of their own land, promising to take her back to her home. She agreed, and bade them not seem to know her till their trading was done and their ship ready to depart. Then she would bring gold from her master's house for passage-money, and the child whose nurse she was. 'Such a cunning one: he trots beside me when I walk abroad. He will bring you a great price, wherever you sell him among men of alien speech.' The plot succeeded. At length one of the strangers, while chaffering over a necklace with the child's mother, gave a sign to the Phœnician nurse, who at evening hurried through the darkening streets, three goblets hidden in her gown and the little Eumæus holding her hand. For six days they voyaged; on the seventh, the woman fell into the hold and was killed. 'Her they threw overboard to be the spoil of seals and fish, and I was left, grieving.' The ship touched at Ithaca, and the child was sold to Laertes, father of Odysseus.

In the Twentieth Book occurs perhaps the only passage in Homer which one may term Celtic. As the reckless suitors revel in Odysseus' hall, the seer Theoclymenus beholds a vision.

'“Ah, wretched men, what is this evil thing that comes upon you? Your heads, your faces, and your knees below are shrouded in night. Groaning is kindled; your cheeks are dabbled with tears. Upon the walls and fair columns are splashes of blood. The forecourt and the hall are crowded with ghosts hurrying towards the gloom of Hell. The sun has perished out of the sky, and an evil mist fills the air.” So spake he, and they all laughed at him gaily.'

Soon the doom falls. Penelope brings out the great bow of

Odysseus and the suitors strive in vain to string it and perform his old feat of sending an arrow through the holes in a row of axe-heads. At last the supposed beggar is allowed amid jeers to make the attempt. Without rising from his seat he strings the bow as easily as a man stretches a new cord upon his lyre, and then shoots his arrow through the axe-heads. Throwing off his rags he begins the slaughter.



THE SHORES OF THE AEGEAN

At length he is reunited to Penelope, pathetically reluctant to acknowledge him lest she be again disappointed. Last of all his recognition-scenes is the interview (xxiv. 220-348) with his father Laertes, who for many years has lived in retirement and grief, tending his remote farm, reduced by age and sorrow to a half-animal quietude. Odysseus at length convinces him that he is indeed his son, by a memory of childhood: after living through two epics he recalls the day 'when I followed thee about the orchard . . . thou gavest me thirteen plum-trees, ten apple-trees, forty fig-trees and didst promise me fifty rows of vines'.

The Homeric manner has been described by Matthew Arnold as possessing four qualities : rapidity, plainness and directness of style, plainness and directness of ideas, and nobility. The first brings up, in its acutest form, the difficulty of translating Homer. Greek is more flexible than English, possesses a vastly larger proportion of long melodious words, is retarded far less by the clotting of consonants. Moreover, in the hexameter Homer employs a measure native to Greek, and capable of lightness and speed as well as dignity. The result is that, whenever he wishes, he can be amazingly rapid and elastic and yet—here is the difficulty of English—without becoming glib and trivial. The greatest poetry in our tongue, not only *Paradise Lost* but the comparatively agile verse of the balcony-scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, is necessarily slower—in Milton immensely slower—than Homeric poetry. Prose-versions are in this respect well-nigh hopeless. In English blank verse there is one very good experiment, Tennyson's translation of *Iliad*, viii. 542-65 : ' So Hector spake ; the Trojans roared applause,' &c. But Tennyson, with his perfect taste, chose a passage which is unusually slow in the Greek. Another tempting medium has been the English hexameter ; that is, a measure corresponding to the Greek but substituting stress-accent for quantity. (The best-known poem in this metre is Longfellow's *Evangeline*.) Dr. Hawtrey's version of the passage about Helen and her brothers (quoted on p. 24) is a brilliant success, but the device is generally considered a failure—a lengthy passage demonstrates its weakness, if only because the hexameter rhythm is not natural to English. Pope's celebrated translation into heroic couplets, despite what are now obvious flaws, is yet the only production in our language which does give something of the Homeric speed and elasticity :

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring  
Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly Goddess, sing—  
That wrath which hurled to Pluto's gloomy reign

wait at the very crisis while the poet relates, in some seventy lines, how Odysseus came by the scar. These irrational expansions are largely due to the manner in which the epics grew: the fresh matter was imperfectly adjusted, in scope as in subject, to its surroundings. Further, we may suspect that in the *Odyssey* one factor was the wish to bring the second poem to a length not markedly inferior to that of its companion.

Finally, though Homer's influence upon later literature would form a gigantic theme, one may yet briefly note how many types of later work are here to be found in embryo. The dirges uttered by Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen over Hector's body (*Iliad*, xxiv. 723-76) mark the beginning of lyric poetry. Drama, again, is to be found, not only in the loose sense of the word—in that sense, of course, it is common—but in its precise meaning. And the later the passage is in probable date, the more marked is this sense of drama. In the second half of the *Odyssey* recognitions are delayed for no other purpose than to increase the tension: Odysseus lies to his father (xxiv. 302 sqq.) in order that Laertes' normal yearning may change to downright heartbreak and so give greater effect to Odysseus' revelation of himself. Even the Alexandrian idyll is anticipated in that awful moment when Hector communes with himself while awaiting Achilles (*Iliad*, xxii. 126 sqq.): '... not now may I hold murmured converse with him from an oak or a rock, as maid and swain are used—maid and swain in murmured converse one with the other.' And the picaresque novel springs from Homer: the *Satyricon* of Petronius was in its plot a parody of the *Odyssey*. Comedy, according to Aristotle, was descended from the Homeric *Margites*, and even in the *Odyssey* itself, some scenes of Penelope's wooers have been regarded as foreshadowing the New Comedy of Menander and his fellows. It has been said often, and justly, that Homeric poetry was the Bible of the Greeks. It was also the training-ground of every literary artist, every man of taste and education, throughout the Greek world.

## Sappho

THE dates both of Sappho's birth and of her death are unknown, but it is clear that she 'flourished' about 600 B. C. Her birthplace was Eresus in Lesbos, but her life was spent mostly at Mitylene in the same island, though she was for a time banished and sailed to Sicily. She was married and had a daughter; one of her brothers, Charaxus, became entangled with the courtesan Rhodopis in Egypt, and Sappho reproached him in a poem to which Herodotus refers (ii. 135) and of which fragments have recently been found at Oxyrhynchus. The poet Alcaeus sought her love, but she seems to have rejected him; we possess a fragment of his address and another of her reply. At Mitylene Sappho had a school of girls to whom she taught music and poetry; in her extant work are frequent allusions to pupils and rivals.

Her writings originally filled nine books, but what now remains is in bulk pitiable. It is said that the poems were deliberately destroyed, through clerical influence, in the Byzantine age; the extant fragments escaped because they were quoted in prose writings. Two of these are of some length. The *Ode to Aphrodite* (twenty-eight lines) is preserved by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the so-called *Ode to Anactoria* by the author of the treatise *On the Sublime*.

Sappho has been universally regarded as the greatest of all poetesses. The same qualities shine throughout her work, in single lines—quoted originally not for their excellence but to illustrate some point of dialect or metre—as in complete poems. Those qualities are beauty, vibrant life, a peerless faculty of directness—this even in the lighter, sometimes humorous, pieces.

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But nearly all her extant writing is personal love-poetry, where the steady blaze of passion, the divine simplicity which is never naïve, but the outcome of superb genius wedded to immense spiritual force, have created flawless perfection. Others write



SAPPHO

A Graeco-Roman painting

(as we put it) about love ; Sappho writes love itself. Keats and Propertius, splendid as they are, convey passion by elaborations, similes, allusions to story, moving through the mazes of sophisticated emotion. Sappho by miracle tells the fact itself, in her lovely Aeolic dialect and mostly in a simple metre invented by her and called by her name. Translation must evidently be a weak

substitute, but a version<sup>1</sup> which, refusing alien enrichment, retains a touch of her own simplicity and fire, may well be studied :

God ! What ecstatic joy to be  
The man who sits before you, he  
Into whose ears melodiously  
Your tones descend,

Your lovely laughter, that dismays  
The heart within me ; when I raise  
My eyes to you a moment, strays  
My voice away.

My speech is shattered ; through my limbs  
Deep runs a liquid flame ; all swims  
Before my eyes ; a torrent brims  
Loud in my ears.

Sweat streaming falls ; a tremor shakes  
My body wholly ; blood forsakes  
My pallid cheeks ; life all but takes  
His leave of me.

## 4

*Pindar*

PINDAR was born at Cynoscephalae, a village near Thebes in Boeotia, about 520 B. C. He began early the practice of lyrical composition : a pretty story relates that in his childhood bees laid honey upon his lips as he slept. Among his instructors were the local poetesses Corinna and Myrto, and later the illustrious Lasos of Hermione. At the age of twenty he produced his first extant poem, the Tenth Pythian ode. He probably visited Sicily, and perhaps Cyrene. His praise of Athens, we read, so annoyed the Thebans that they fined him ; the sum was paid by the

<sup>1</sup> By my colleague Miss K. Freeman.

a poem full of the Graces who rule the ancient town and quietly resonant with its gentle waters. It is, indeed, the Graces, even more than the Muses, to whom he ascribes his inspiration. They, and all the gods, appear incessantly in his work, themes of invocation or story uttered with wondering reverence and trust. He was deeply concerned with the religions of 'mystery', those doctrines of life beyond the grave which permeate the Second Olympian and the beautiful Dirges whereof some few fragments remain. 'For them shines the power of the sun below while it is night with us ; set among meadows of scarlet roses, the fringe of their city lies embowered in fragrant trees that bend beneath golden fruit. . . .'

Why are these topics, gentle breeding, politics, religion, found in poems which celebrate boxing-matches or chariot-races? First, the fact itself which he commemorates is (for such powers) narrow in scope and varies only in detail from contest to contest. He must join other themes with it ; otherwise his work would have been as monotonous as the efforts put forth by our own chroniclers of cricket and football. Secondly, the subject is not after all so narrow as we are prone to think. The games were part of religion ; all contests were in honour of some god : Zeus at Olympia and Nemea, Apollo at Pytho, Poseidon at the Isthmus. These odes normally include, with praise of the victor and some details of the contest, a 'myth'—some brilliantly told story of god or hero—eulogy of the victor's city, recital of successes gained by his ancestors, and advice, social or moral, which often includes wider commentary upon life. 'First of prizes is good fortune ; the second luck is good repute ; if a man meets and seizes both, he has received the supreme garland' (*Pyth.* i. 98).

But the chief fact about Pindar is that, alone among great poets, he is mainly aesthetic. Beauty, not righteousness, is instinctively his ideal. This, even more than the difficulty of his Greek, has tended to put him in the category of authors who are talked of, but not read. We shall not discuss here whether aesthetic fact

is as authentic as moral fact. But almost every one thinks of the former as inferior to the latter: it is far more common to say 'I value beauty because it makes me a better man' than to say 'I value righteousness because it sharpens my appreciation of beauty'. Pindar stands apart from the great European tradition in which his contemporary Aeschylus is so commanding a figure.

The result is that we find in his work not great characters, not great action, but great pictures. He is a magnificent colourist: fitly does he bid his Muse weld together gold, ivory, and coral (*Nem.* vii. 78). In the Sixth Olympian, the birth of Iamos is described in language that recalls Botticelli: 'And she, laying aside her purple-broidered girdle and cruse of silver beneath a dark thicket, gave birth to a man-child on whom was the spirit of God. To her aid the golden-haired Apollo sent compassionate Ilithyia and the Fates.' The pictures, we see, are in motion, but each presents one incident. So in the superbly luxuriant opening of the Fifth Nemean he cries:

'No maker of statues am I, to create slumberous images standing inert upon their pedestal. No! upon every merchant-vessel, every skiff, sweet Minstrelsy, speed for Aegina, spreading the news that Lampon's son, Pytheas of mighty thews, has won the garland in the *pancratation* at Nemea, though not yet upon his cheek appears the tender bloom like that of budding grapes.'

All his work blazes with verbal beauty, not riotous but governed by that sense of measure, of form, which all Greek writers of the classical period instinctively follow. Gold, flowers, beauty of body and physical action, radiance and sparkle of sun and wine—these fill his odes with a splendour which at times would intoxicate the mind were it not for the steady surge of his rhythm, the studied balance of his structure. For Pindar has far more than magnificent words; he moulds them into superb sentences: 'Hail, god-built Island, blossom most beloved by shining-tressèd Leto's children, daughter of the sea, broad earth's marvel unremoved, which

mortals name Delos, but gods in Heaven the far-shining star in the sombre expanse of Earth' (fr. 87). To this majesty of phrase he joins mastery of exquisiterhythm—to hear and feel the great Dorian measure thundering through the vast spaces of the Fourth Pythian is a joy and amazement even after the marvels of Homeric verse.

It is this glory of language wedded to magnificent rhythm that makes Pindar of all poets the most difficult to translate; it is indeed quite impossible to do so with any approach to adequacy. If one combined the powers of Milton and Swinburne, one would still fail, because his effects depend upon the very texture of the Greek language far more closely than the effects of any other poet. Nevertheless, people attempt to translate him, as if one made a model of Niagara out of calico. Such versions do assist us to find the external 'meaning' of the Greek, but a far better



A boy victor crowning himself  
Relief from Sunium

conception of Pindar's work may be gained from Gray's *Progress of Poesy* or Matthew Arnold's *Westminster Abbey*. The latter poem shares at least one splendid quality with the Pindaric ode. Arnold conceives his friend Stanley as a source of light in his generation, and throughout the elegy this thought of light recurs in varied and beautiful forms. So, for instance, in the First Pythian. The poet begins with that sublime address to Music as the power which instils harmony into the breasts of all gods and creatures, and before

which all lawless discordant things tremble. So he passes to Hiero's warfare against the Etruscans—Hiero the champion of order and civilization, his enemies the exemplars of lawless might, like the Titans who opposed Zeus. Throughout runs the conception of music, harmony, order, facing discord and barbarism. That is why he speaks of the war-yell uttered by the Etruscans and prays Heaven for tranquillity in Hiero's domain; why at the close, in mention of another Sicilian prince—the hateful Phalaris—he contrasts the bitter talk, which keeps his name in ill remembrance, with the minstrelsy of harps beneath Hiero's roof and the gentle lilt of boyish voices. Again and again the study of a Pindaric ode will reveal some simple picture which gives deepened meaning and golden structure to the sequence of prayer, exhortation, myth, and metaphor which else might seem disjointed, however lovely.

## 5

*Aeschylus*

AESCHYLUS was born at Eleusis, near Athens, in 525 B. C. He began to exhibit tragedies at the age of twenty-five, but did not win the first prize till 485. The Persians came in 490 and 480, and Aeschylus fought against them—his epitaph mentions Marathon, and his celebrated description of Salamis in the *Persae* makes it clear that he was present. On the invitation of Hiero, the Syracusan king, he visited Sicily soon after 470, and wrote a play to celebrate Hiero's new city, Etna. After the production of the *Oresteia* (458) he again went to Sicily, where he died. It is said that as he was sitting on the hillside near Gela an eagle, mistaking the poet's bald head for a stone, dropped a tortoise upon it and killed him.

His works comprised at least eighty plays, of which seven

survive, with some hundreds of fragments. Three—*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroe*, *Eumenides*—form a complete trilogy, often called the *Oresteia*. Tragedy so-called existed before Aeschylus, but it was he who made it a truly dramatic form: we are told by Aristotle (*Poetic* 1449 a) that he ‘first introduced a second actor; he diminished the importance of the chorus, assigning the leading part to dialogue’. Each actor could, and often did, sustain more than one role, by changing his dress and mask. Aeschylus’ two actors made possible that collision of personalities and aims which is the essence of drama; and the gradual restriction of the lyrical part left more and more room for strictly dramatic development.

The *Supplikes* or *Suppliant Women* (perhaps 492 B. C.) is his first extant play and therefore the earliest drama in European literature. Its scene is laid near Argos. The Chorus, consisting of the fifty daughters of Danaus, have fled from Egypt to escape marriage with their cousins, the fifty sons of Egyptus. Their father makes them take refuge at the altar of Zeus and so become suppliants of the State. The Argive king enters and after consulting his people accepts the appeal and the risk of war with the Egyptians. While the women are alone, an Egyptian herald enters and roughly bids them go to the ships and submit to his masters. They refuse, and he, with his mates, is preparing to drag them away when the king returns and dismisses the herald, who threatens war.—Such is the action, which was continued in the two other plays of the trilogy. It is plainly slight, and the main interest of the drama lies in the splendid odes which take up more than half the work, filled with the story of Io, the maidens’ fears and hopes, their great invocations to Zeus. ‘Whosoever it is decreed by nod of Zeus that a thing be brought to fullness, it falls not prostrate, but on its feet. Yea, through thicket and shadow stretch the paths of his devices, that no thought can spy them out.’<sup>1</sup>

The *Persae* or *Persians* (470 B. C. or earlier) takes place before

<sup>1</sup> vv. 91–5 (Professor Tucker’s translation).

the palace of Xerxes the Persian king. Aged councillors sing of the host which has gone to conquer Greece. Atossa, the queen-mother, enters, distressed by an ill-omened dream. A messenger arrives announcing the overthrow at Salamis, and while Atossa seeks the materials of a sacrifice the Chorus deplore the loss of the conquering Darius, father of Xerxes. Atossa returns, the libations are offered, and in response to prayer the ghost of Darius appears; he mourns his son's impious folly and foretells the defeat at Plataea. Atossa goes to meet Xerxes, who arrives in despair, and the play ends with the wailing of king and councillors.—This is the only extant Greek tragedy based on contemporary events, and Aeschylus has avoided the artistic dangers of mere exultation, firstly by placing the scene in the country of the defeated, secondly by his insistence on giving the praise not to Greece—even Themistocles is never mentioned by name—but to God. The narrative of the sea-fight is among the noblest passages in Greek, and perhaps nowhere else does the trochaic metre combine grandeur so beautifully with its normal speed and grace:

' Friends, instruct me : in what quarter of the earth does Athens lie? '

' Far toward the western regions where the Lord of Day expires.'

*Seven against Thebes* (467 B. C.) tells of the quarrel between the brothers Eteocles and Polynices. Eteocles became king of Thebes and expelled Polynices, who sought aid from Adrastus of Argos. The Argive host attacks Thebes, and the scene of the play is inside the beleaguered town. A chorus of maidens, in a magnificent lyric, express their terror. Eteocles is told that seven champions are about to lead the attack upon the seven gates. As each man is described, the king details a Theban to face him. The seventh is Polynices, and Eteocles himself, recognizing the Curse of his house, insists on fighting his brother. After an ode lamenting the curse of Oedipus, news is brought that the invaders are routed and that the brothers have slain each other. The two bodies are



brought in, lamented by their sisters Antigone and Ismene. A herald proclaims a decree that Polynices is to be denied burial, but Antigone defies the State, declaring that she will bury him.—The chief merits of this tragedy are the splendid presentation of war's alarms, and the Choosing of the Champions, a long quasi-epic



The spring at the head of the Nemean Valley from which the seven champions drank

passage. Aeschylus was thought to have pointed at his great contemporary Aristides in his description of Amphiaraus :

His buckler bore no blason ; for he seeks  
Not to seem great, but to be great indeed,  
Reaping the deep-ploughed furrow of his soul  
Wherefrom the harvest of good counsel springs.

The date of *Prometheus Bound* is doubtful, but it probably came late in the poet's career. Its scene is a gorge in Scythia, where the

Titan Prometheus is nailed to the rocks by order of Zeus for stealing fire from Heaven and giving it to mankind. The chorus of sea-nymphs condole with him ; he tells how Zeus had intended to destroy mankind and create a new race, but Prometheus, loving men, thwarted him and gave them the means to civilization. The god Oceanus arrives on a four-legged bird, and in vain urges the prisoner to make peace with Zeus. Io, the heifer-maiden, another victim of Zeus, appears and relates her wanderings. Prometheus prophesies her future journeys, and tells that Zeus will fall because he is preparing to marry one whose child is to be greater than his father. Then he reveals that Io shall be the ancestress of Heracles, who will release him. Hermes enters to insist on Zeus's behalf that Prometheus shall reveal the name of the fatal bride. He refuses, and amid a dreadful upheaval sinks into Hades.—In this drama there are three great features. First, the superb management of perspective : perspectives of place—the whole earth viewed from the Caucasus and in the accounts of Io's wandering ; and perspectives of time in the story told by Prometheus of the war in Heaven and of his own deliverer many generations hence. Second, the picture of the Titan himself, the most terrific figure in ancient literature and the noblest in its mythology : he is the eternal archetype of intellectual and moral grandeur defying omnipotence in defence of the weak. Third, the conception of Zeus. In this play he is a raw youthful tyrant ; but we know enough about the companion-dramas (the *Fire-Bringer* and *Prometheus Unbound*) to realize that Zeus goes through a moral development, finally becoming the centre of goodness and wisdom as well as power, while Prometheus dwindles to the local deity familiar to the poet's contemporaries.

*Agamemnon* (458) has for its background the palace of King Agamemnon at Argos. A sentinel upon the roof sees the beacon which announces the capture of Troy. A chorus of aged councillors enter and sing of the fleet's departure for Troy and of Iphigenia's

death. Clytaemnestra, the queen, tells them that last night Troy has fallen : the news has been brought by a chain of beacons. A herald announces that Agamemnon is nearing the city ; he describes the miseries of the campaign and the disappearance of Menelaus during a storm. The chorus sing of Helen. Agamemnon arrives, bringing Cassandra the prophetess, his unwilling concubine. Clytaemnestra, after an effusive welcome, takes him within, and Cassandra bursts into a prophetic frenzy foretelling the murder of Agamemnon and herself by Clytaemnestra. After she has entered the palace, cries are heard, and the queen appears, glorying in her deed and defying the chorus. Aegisthus, her lover, arrives and the two prepare to rule sternly over Argos.—This is the greatest of all Greek plays, showing Aeschylus's dramatic and lyrical power in full and balanced perfection. The great sinister figure of Clytaemnestra, the craven spiteful Aegisthus, the heavy but imposing Agamemnon, and the minor characters are all drawn with mastery. Cassandra's scene touches the heights of pathos and dread as her vision grows slowly more definite. The odes are if possible finer still—the exquisitely appealing and pitiful picture of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the miraculous expression of Helen's beauty and the anguish of the deserted husband, and the tale how War, the money-changer of bodies, sends home in return for stalwart men scanty handfuls of charred dust :

Ares on foughten field sets up his scales ;  
Bodies of slain men, stark and cold,  
These are this merchant-moneyer's bales,  
The which in faggot-fires at Ilium turned  
To finer dust than is the sifted gold  
And worth more tears, he sends  
Back to the dead men's friends ;  
For them that fell too light a freight,  
For them that mourn a grievous weight,  
All in a clay-cold jar so civilly inurned.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Cookson.

The narratives, again—Clytemnestra's beacon-speech, Aegisthus's horrible story of Thyestes' banquet, and the herald's tale of Troy—are perfect in quite different manners.

The *Choephoreæ*, or *Libation-Bearers*, is the second play of the trilogy. Orestes, son of the murdered Agamemnon, enters with his friend Pylades and greets his father's tomb by laying upon it a lock of his hair. They withdraw, and the chorus of maidens, led by Electra, Agamemnon's daughter, enter to placate with libation the dead king's spirit on behalf of Clytemnestra, who has been terrified by a dream. Electra discovers the lock of hair and recognizes it as meaning kinship with herself. Orestes comes forward and after convincing her of his identity induces her to use the libations against Clytemnestra, whom Orestes has been ordered by the Delphic oracle to slay. In a lengthy lyrical service the shade of Agamemnon is invoked to aid the avenger. Then Orestes, representing himself and his suite as Phocian merchants, gains speech with the queen and reports that Orestes is dead, hoping thus to disarm her suspicion. But the queen, after taking them within as guests, sends a woman to fetch Aegisthus with his body-guard. The chorus induce the messenger to alter the message, Aegisthus arrives alone, enters the guest-chambers, and is killed. Orestes comes forth and meets Clytemnestra, now alarmed by news of Aegisthus's death. She begs mercy, but after a moment of indecision he drives her within to die. The chorus sing in triumph, and the two corpses are revealed, Orestes standing by them and displaying the bloodstained robe of his father. He addresses the people, but distraction comes over him: he espies the furies of his mother and flees to ask protection from Apollo at Delphi.—This tragedy is for us inferior to its two companions, partly because we cannot enter fully into the justification of Orestes, partly because there is less movement. Further, the character-drawing is unremarkable, because the greatest force in the play is impersonal—the law of reprisal.

The *Eumenides* or 'Kindly Ones' (an euphemistic name of the Furies) begins before the temple of Delphi. Within, the fugitive Orestes is surrounded by the pursuing Furies, now lulled to sleep



DELPHI. Looking down the Castalian gorge, with the Castalian spring at one's feet. Here pilgrims sprinkled themselves before consulting the oracle.

for a moment by Apollo, who brings Orestes forth and sends him to flee afresh. The ghost of Clytaemnestra awakens the Furies, who bitterly upbraid Apollo and are contemptuously dismissed by him. The scene changes to Athens, where Orestes clasps the statue

of Athena as a suppliant. The Furies enter upon his trail and chant their frightful Song of Binding—the assertion of their rights as avengers of blood and all crime. Athena enters and determines that the case must be tried by a court of Athenians. Later the court is assembled on the Areopagus, and Apollo comes to speak for Orestes. The votes are taken and found equal; Athena's casting vote acquits Orestes, and he departs in freedom. But the Furies threaten to wreak their wrath upon Attica, blighting crops, herds, and women. Athena at length soothes them by undertaking that their functions shall be discharged by the newly-formed court and by promising them great honours as dwellers in the land.—This magnificent drama is notable above all for that vivid sense of sin, of damnation, which Aeschylus shares with no pagan writer.

Oh! this is the song for the victim slain,  
 To blight his heart and blast his brain,  
 Wilder and wilder and whirl him along!  
 This is the song, the Furies' song,  
 Not sung to harp or lyre,  
 To bind men's souls in links of brass  
 And over their bodies to mutter and pass  
 A withering fire!<sup>1</sup>

Next, the quarrel between Apollo and the Furies is presented with a fairness both moral and artistic. Lastly, Aeschylus shows himself a true Athenian in his astounding solution: a familiar element in the Athenian constitution is to inherit the dread prerogatives of those frightful daughters of earth and darkness.

Aeschylus is one of the world's master-tragedians, but we shall err if we compare him with Sophocles or Shakespeare unless we remember his place in the development of drama. He was a pioneer—practically the inventor of tragedy—and has definite kinship with Stesichorus and Pindar. It would not be absurd to call him a lyrist who happened to become a dramatist.

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Cookson.

Thus we find the *Supplices* as much an opera as a play; thus even in his latest work we find a strong tendency to poetical elaboration, for its own sake, marking the language of the 'episodes'—in manner he is quite as far from his younger contemporary Sophocles as is Racine. These facts are important to the study of his plots. He is indifferent to crudities, even impossibilities, in structure which any later playwright would have avoided. The *Prometheus* and the *Choephoroe* have little development; in *Agamemnon* the king arrives almost as soon as his beacon-message; and so forth. The fact is that Aeschylus is often content merely to juxtapose great scenes, like Pindar in the *Fourth Pythian*. Instead of a mounting curve he gives us a flight of stairs; that is one reason why he was a master of trilogy-construction. In this respect he compares with Sophocles as Dickens compares with Hardy.

His merits are stupendous: overwhelming grandeur, pungent instinctive picturesqueness, moral splendour, and a sense of religion unparalleled in pagan Europe. His grandeur shows itself in the simplicity and greatness of the conceptions on which his plays rest, in the characters which he has conceived as their vehicles. Those characters resemble neither the psychological concoctions familiar to-day nor the sublime creations of Shakespeare. The English master succeeds by revealing facet after facet of a many-sided personality, the Greek by the sudden emergence of a being complete on the instant, with no subtleties or half-lights. As for picturesqueness, Aeschylus's diction is compacted of pictures. A man in perplexity 'ponders over the chess-board' (*Supplices*, 12), a distressed heart 'wears a black tunic' (*Persae*, 115), 'the sea laughs in ripples numberless' (*Prometheus*, 89), the beacon-flame of the *Agamemnon* is endowed with eagerness, resolution, and joy. His moral splendour is well manifested in his conception of the Atreid or hereditary Curse. Though some fearful crime brings the curse into being and does, as tradition held, affect the

sinner's descendants, the poet will not believe that they are forced into crime; rather, when they are themselves sinfully disposed, the memory of the curse arises and adds a fresh temptation. Deeply as Aeschylus realizes the potency of sin, he breaks the entail: the individual is his own master, responsible for his own misdeeds and capable of receiving his own salvation. This indeed is the only morality consistent with genuine drama. Lastly, his deeply religious temper is felt in his idea of Zeus. Aeschylus is the only Greek writer who has any conception of what we mean by a saviour. He feels that man needs some divine leader joined to him by ties emotional as well as moral and metaphysical: and the power thus conceived he boldly identifies with the traditional king of Heaven. 'Zeus, whoe'er he be, if this name be pleasing to him, by this do I address him. When I ponder all things, my conjecture can light upon none save Zeus, if I am in truth to fling from my heart its burden of futility' (*Agamemnon* 160 sqq.). Aeschylus had no real successor. The great garment of his genius was parted among dithyrambists and philosophers, dramatists and theologians. A great Athenian, he lived before the culmination of the Attic spirit.

## 6

*Sophocles*

SOPHOCLES was born at Colonus, near Athens, in 496 B. C. At the age of sixteen he was chosen, for his beauty, to lead the choir of boys at the celebration of Salamis. When twenty-eight, he produced tragedies for the first time and won the prize against Aeschylus. Throughout his long life he worked with great public success at tragic composition, winning either first or second prize eighteen times. Sophocles took some part in public affairs also,



serving twice as a general. He died in 406 B. C., and was revered by his countrymen as a 'hero'.

The interest to be found in Sophocles passes beyond the domain of drama. One cannot but be thrilled by the thought that once in the history of our race there has been a man who 'had everything'; it is impossible to think of any source of happiness which was not possessed by Sophocles. We can form a more concrete notion of his personality than of any other fifth-century Greek. His social charm, joined to his vast poetical and dramatic powers, enabled him to gather a *salon*, and from Ion's Memoirs we gain some idea of the talk in this circle. When the poet came to Chios, for instance, he engaged in a dispute with the local schoolmaster about poetical adjectives. He was a friend of Herodotus, for whom he wrote a poem, and whom he quotes several times. Two important remarks of his survive. 'I depict men as they ought to be, Euripides depicts them as they are.' 'My dramatic wild oats were imitation of Aeschylus's pomp; then I evolved my own harsh mannerism; finally I embraced the best style, that most appropriate to the portrayal of human nature.' He did great service to tragedy on the strictly technical side. In particular, he introduced scene-painting, added a third actor, and wrote tetralogies each play of which was quite independent of the others.



SOPHOCLES

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SOPHOCLES

*Antigone* was produced in 441 B. C. It is difficult to say whether it is earlier or later than *Ajax*. The scene is laid before the palace at Thebes, on the morning after the repulse of the Argives and the fratricidal deaths of Polynices and Eteocles. King Creon orders that no one shall give burial to Polynices under pain of death. Antigone, sister of Polynices, sprinkles the ritual dust and is brought before Creon. She insists that his decree cannot override the unwritten laws of Heaven. Creon, disregarding the persuasions of his son Haemon, Antigone's betrothed, sends her to be immured in a cave. The prophet Tiresias announces that the gods resent the pollution caused by the unburied corpse. Creon gives way and hurries first to bury Polynices, then to release Antigone, who hangs herself before his arrival. Haemon stabs himself over her body, and Eurydice, Creon's wife, learning of Haemon's death, commits suicide.—This tragedy, beautiful but somewhat stiff in diction, character-drawing, and general conception, has two great features. One is the magnificent odes: the first, rejoicing in the deliverance of Thebes; the beautiful lyric on the power of Love—Eros, unconquered in fight, whose path is over the sea, whose vigil is kept upon the eyes of a maid; and the famous song of Man and his all-embracing enterprise. The other is the conflict between the two duties set before Antigone. To suppose her right beyond question and Creon a stupid villain is to destroy the play. We must remember the well-nigh unbounded importance of the State for all Athenians. Antigone and the king are to be regarded as—roughly and in the first instance—equally right. Only by degrees is she justified.

The action of *Ajax* passes mostly before that hero's tent on the Trojan plain. Athena explains to Odysseus that Ajax, enraged by the decision of the Greeks to bestow the arms of Achilles on Odysseus rather than Ajax, has sought to slay Agamemnon and others in their sleep; but Athena sent madness upon him so that he slaughtered cattle in their place. The chorus of sailors enter.

Ajax, now sane and brooding over his disgrace, talks with them and the Trojan captive Tecmessa, who has borne him a son. Answering their admonitions evasively, and bidding a covert farewell to the child, he retires to a lonely spot and falls upon his sword. Teucer, his brother, hurries in too late to save him, but confronts and defies Agamemnon and Menelaus, who have ordered that Ajax's body shall not be buried. In the end Odysseus persuades Agamemnon to yield.—Ajax is a superb study of essential greatness. It matters not that he has (in purpose) committed an atrocious crime, and is only soured, not chastened, by his fall. He is conceived on great simple lines, and the poet's marvellous art causes us to realize his grandeur despite his immense faults. Tecmessa is the normal woman raised to the height of moral loveliness by the poet's expression of her tenderness and patience. 'Nay, have remembrance even of me. If joy hath been wrought, should not a man hold memory thereof?' Ajax dies at v. 865, and there are several hundred lines more filled by a fierce dispute about his burial. The explanation is, that the question of the play is not 'What is to become of Ajax?' but 'What is to become of his repute?' The suicide is only one step towards his final rehabilitation.

*Electra* has for its background the palace at Argos, whither Orestes returns, accompanied by Pylades and an old slave, to avenge Agamemnon upon Clytaemnestra. Chrysothemis, daughter of Agamemnon and sister of Electra, is sent by her mother to appease Agamemnon's shade, but is persuaded by Electra to pray his help for the supposedly absent Orestes. The old slave brings a story that Orestes has been killed in a chariot-race, and the queen's fears are allayed. Chrysothemis returns to Electra, joyfully announcing the presence of Orestes, since she has seen a lock of his hair on the tomb. But Electra answers that he is dead; while she is mourning for him, Orestes himself brings an urn, pretending to be a stranger with the ashes of Orestes. Electra's lamentation over it reveals to him who she is, and he makes himself

known. The men go within and slay Clytaemnestra. Aegisthus arrives and, hearing from Electra that Orestes' body has been brought home, triumphantly orders it to be carried forth. When he uncovers it, he finds the corpse of Clytaemnestra, and is driven within to die.—This play should be compared with the *Choephore* of Aeschylus and the *Electra* of Euripides. Its chief features are : (i) the horror of the matricide does not disturb Sophocles, who



Looking south towards Argos from the top of Acre-Corinth

refers the responsibility to the oracle which commanded it ; (ii) the whole action is considered from the standpoint of Electra's history and character ; (iii) there is a marked ' sense of the theatre ', to which we owe the magnificent lament over the urn, the considerable use made of Chrysothemis, and the *coup de théâtre* when Aegisthus expects to see the dead face of Orestes.

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* is also of uncertain date. Thebes is ravaged by pestilence. Oedipus announces to his terrified people that he has already sent Creon, brother of his wife Jocasta, to

consult the Delphic oracle. The response is brought that Thebes will be saved if purged of those who slew Laius, the former king. Oedipus is told that Laius was killed by robbers; one man only of his retinue escaped. He calls upon the slayer to declare himself, and pronounces excommunication against the unknown if he remains silent. The chorus-leader suggests that Tiresias the seer be consulted; Oedipus replies that he has already been summoned. The other remarks that some say Laius was killed by travellers. Tiresias enters, but is so reluctant to discuss the mystery that Oedipus charges him with complicity. Tiresias accuses Oedipus of the murder, and the other in rage exclaims that Tiresias is plotting with Creon to make the latter king. The prophet threatens him with mysterious horrors and withdraws. Creon enters, dismayed by the charges of Oedipus, who quarrels bitterly with him till Jocasta half reconciles them.

Hearing of Tiresias's accusation, she seeks to encourage him by a proof that soothsaying is untrustworthy. 'An oracle came to Laius that he would be slain by a son of his and mine. But he was killed at a place where three roads met; and the child, not three days old, was cast out upon a mountain, his ankles fastened together. The phrase 'where three roads met' fills Oedipus with alarm. The answers to his questions deepen his dismay, and he sends for the single survivor. Then he tells Jocasta his story. He is the son



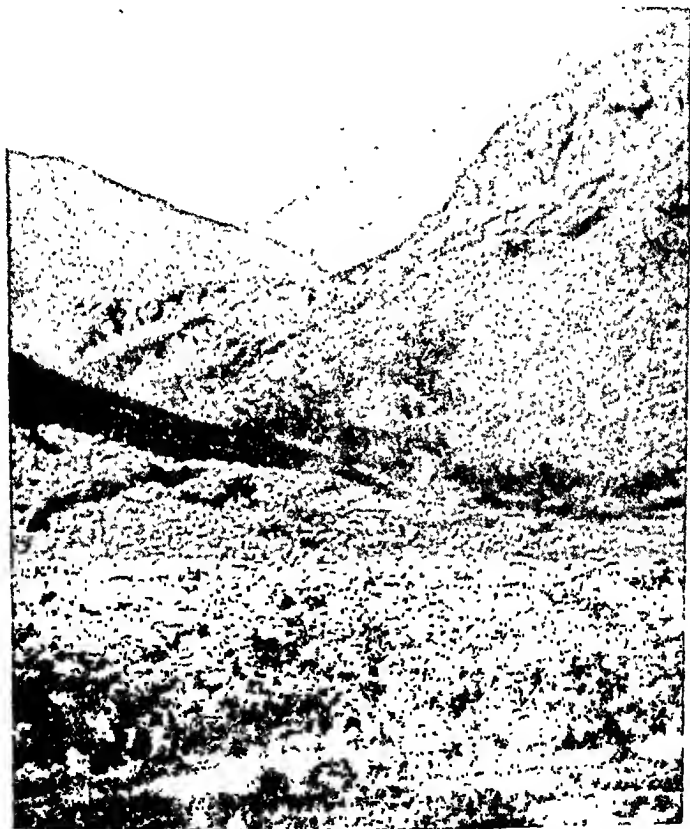
Bronze, thought to represent the blinded  
OEDIPUS

of Polybus, king of Corinth, and was told at Delphi that he would kill his father and marry his mother. He cheated the oracle by never seeing his parents again. Later he met a party such as Jocasta has described, and in a quarrel slew them all. Apparently he is the slayer of Laius; his only hope lies in the survivor who spoke of robbers in the plural. Soon a Corinthian enters, announcing that Polybus is dead. Jocasta points out that Polybus was the man whom Oedipus feared he must slay. She mocks at the oracle, but he points out that his mother still lives. The messenger intervenes: 'But you are not the son of Polybus and Merope.' He explains that he himself gave Oedipus when a babe to Polybus. The child was found in the glens of Cithaeron with an iron thrust through his ankles. The Corinthian does not know who did this, but the man from whom he received the babe may know—another herdsman, of Laius's household. It now appears that this second herdsman is the person summoned earlier. Jocasta breaks into a cry of agony and rushes within. The aged servant of Laius approaches, and the truth at length comes to light: Oedipus is the son of Laius and Jocasta. He rushes into the palace, finds that Jocasta has hanged herself, and destroys his own eyes. After a while the stricken man reappears, but Creon enters and bids him hide in the palace. Oedipus prays to be cast forth upon Cithaeron again, but Creon replies that the oracle must be consulted. Oedipus bids farewell to his little daughters, and all go within.—This tragedy may be set beside *Macbeth* and *Hedda Gabler* as an example of superb construction—not merely consummate skill in mechanism (that may be seen equally well in Jonson's *Volpone*), but construction produced by, illustrating, and causing the emotions, authentic and engrossing, of the several characters. In particular, the action is pivoted upon Oedipus: were his soul, his temperament, even his manner, changed but slightly, the plot could not proceed as it does. Yet there is nothing factitious about him: dignified, kindly, patriotic, hot-tempered, spiritually brave,



not for a moment does he allow us to feel that he is being manipulated by the playwright.

The *Trachiniae* or *Women of Trachis* is laid before the house of Heracles in Trachis. Deianira, his wife, is distressed by his absence,



The 'place "where three roads met"'

since an oracle has said that this his last enterprise will bring him either death or peace. Their son Hyllus departs to aid him in his attack on the city of Eurytus in Euboea. Lichas enters, telling of Heracles' victory and bringing the captive Iole, beloved by Heracles. Deianira elicits this last fact from Lichas, and to win

her husband back sends a gift—a robe anointed with the blood of the centaur Nessus as a love-charm. Later she discovers that the charm was deadly poison. Next Hyllus returns with news that his father is dying in torment, and Deianira stabs herself, after which Hyllus learns the truth; and when Heracles is carried in, cursing Deianira, Hyllus explains her error. Heracles commands that his body be burnt on Mount Oeta and that Hyllus marry Iole.—The central figure and informing spirit of this tragedy is Deianira. The action shows how she does in fact bring back her husband and triumph over his later love. Her nature, despite all the sorrow and destruction, is marvellously appealing, strong, and gracious. Much of her power lies in quiet disillusionment, as when she says of Iole:

The flower of her age is in its spring,  
But mine in autumn; and the eyes of men  
Still pluck the blossom, shunning withered charms.

*Philoctetes* was produced in 409 B.C. The scene is laid before the cave of Philoctetes on the desolate island of Lemnos. The Greeks on their way to Troy marooned Philoctetes here because, stung in the foot by a snake, he troubled them with his cries and the odour of his incurable wound. But now Odysseus and the young Neoptolemus have been sent to fetch him, since Troy can be captured only by help of Philoctetes and the bow which Heracles bequeathed him. Their great obstacle is Philoctetes' bitter resentment against the Greeks. Neoptolemus wins the sufferer's confidence, while Odysseus keeps in the background and helps the plot by sending a false message. When the bow is secured and Philoctetes is about to accompany Neoptolemus—back to his home, as he thinks—the youth tells him their real destination. Philoctetes' reproaches win Neoptolemus and, defying Odysseus, he promises to convey Philoctetes home. At the last moment Heracles appears in the sky and bids his old comrade seek Troy. He consents, and bids farewell to the scene of his ten years' wretched-

ness.—Though not the greatest play of Sophocles, this is in several respects the most interesting. For the first time the fullest possible use is made of the three actors. There is a magnificent picture of Philoctetes' life amid the animals, birds, and desolate landscape of his island-home. Odysseus's craftiness produces a masterpiece of intrigue. The ingenuous spirit of Neoptolemus is beautifully studied.

*Oedipus Coloneus*, or *Oedipus at Colonus*, was produced after Sophocles' death by his namesake and grandson. The background is the grove of the Furies at Colonus. Oedipus, an aged blind exile, enters, led by his daughter Antigone. They win the protection of King Theseus, and Oedipus promises that after his death he will defend Athens. Ismene, his other daughter, arrives from Thebes with news of an oracle: in the struggle between Polynices and Eteocles that side is to conquer which has possession of Oedipus. He curses both his sons for their previous neglect. Creon of Thebes enters, and being repelled by Oedipus carries off the two girls and is about to seize Oedipus when he is baffled by the return of Theseus, who rescues the maidens. Polynices comes to ask his father's assistance, but is sent to his doom with curses. A peal of thunder announces to Oedipus that his time has come. He leaves the scene, and a messenger tells how he bade farewell to his daughters, and, watched only by Theseus, descended below the earth: the place of his burial is to be known to no man save the kings of Athens. Antigone resolves to go to Thebes in the hope of reconciling her brothers.—As a poem this is Sophocles' greatest work. The most



The Tragic Actor

famous lyric in the language is that glorious ode in praise of 'our white Colonus, where the nightingale, a constant guest, ever trills his clear note in the covert of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy and the god's inviolate bowers'.<sup>1</sup> The iambic passages are not less beautiful; this play marks, in fact, the culmination of Greek art in this province. A scholar-poet<sup>2</sup> of our time has succeeded in conveying some of this unearthly radiance :

Fair Aigeus' son, only to gods in heaven  
Comes no old age nor death of anything ;  
All else is turmoiled by our master Time.  
The earth's strength fades and manhood's glory fades,  
Faith dies, and unfaith blossoms like a flower. . . .

Nor is the play less remarkable for spiritual intensity. The potency of things unseen is overwhelmingly conveyed : Oedipus after his death will as a *daemon* defend Attica when invaded by Thebes, and in his last hours even of human life this daemonic quality is displayed with almost unbearable power. And despite the curses, the pain, hatred, suffering and regret, the aged poet has made this latest work more full of tenderness than any among its companions.

Sophocles stands at the zenith of the Attic spirit. His Greek is a miraculous blend of beauty, simplicity, flexible ease, and a faintly fastidious dignity. On the dramatic side the chief note of his manner is that he loves to depict a great character governed by some one tremendous emotional appeal and creating drama by its loyalty thereto. Beside the hero is regularly found a secondary person, of smaller stature but possessing practical sagacity, who in the hour of ruin takes command of the situation—for example Creon in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Theseus in the *Coloneus*.

<sup>1</sup> Jebb's version.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Gilbert Murray.

*Euripides*

TRADITION places the birth of Euripides on the very day of Salamis, 480 B.C. His life was devoted to dramatic composition and literary study: he possessed a library, and, avoiding casual society, wrote much of his work in a cave on Salamis. The Ionian philosopher Anaxagoras had great influence upon him, and Socrates is said to have been his friend, though one cannot easily imagine Socrates caring for caves. Euripides was twice married, and had three sons. His last years were passed at the court of Archelaus, king of Macedonia, where he died and was buried in 406 B.C.

Euripides' reputation during his lifetime was great but equivocal: he was one of the writers whom all discuss but few approve. Not till 455 did he 'obtain a chorus' (that is, have his work accepted for performance) and then he won only the third, or lowest, place. He wrote about one hundred plays, but gained the first prize only four times; after his death the *Bacchae* and its companions won a fifth victory. Yet there is no doubt that he was regarded as a distinguished dramatist, despite his unwelcome novelties of views and manner. In later antiquity his reputation was prodigious throughout the Graeco-Roman world.

The novelties just mentioned are not formal, like those introduced by Sophocles; in fact, there are many points in which Euripides is nearer to Aeschylus than to Sophocles. But within the customary framework he shows a profound change of spirit. Persons and classes hitherto condemned or ignored receive from him, not necessarily praise, but lively interest, sympathy, attention from a new point of view. The slaves and common soldiers or citizens who form a mere background in earlier work become

dead woman is a stranger. Later, when the funeral procession is moving, Pheres, Admetus's father, enters to pay his respects but is repelled by Admetus because he refused to die and save Alcestis; an ignoble quarrel ensues. When all have gone, the butler comes forth, complaining of Heracles' drunkenness. Heracles follows, and, sobered by learning the truth, announces his purpose of rescuing Alcestis from Death; he sets out. Admetus comes in with the chorus, expressing his heart-broken desolation. Heracles returns with a veiled woman, whom he says he has won as a prize at a local contest; Admetus must keep her for him till he returns. The king reluctantly consents and she is revealed by Heracles as Alcestis.—The chief qualities of this play are: (i) the charming picture of the heroine as a source of calm sunshine in her home; (ii) the beautiful odes, especially the famous song which tells how the wild beasts flocked to the music of Apollo when he tended Admetus's herds; (iii) the comic tone of several scenes—it so happens that Alcestis's rescue is due to the drunkenness of Heracles, which angers the butler into revealing the truth in order to shame him.

*Medea* was produced in 431 B.C., and obtained the third prize. The background is the house of Medea at Corinth. Jason, whom she helped to win the Golden Fleece, proposes to desert her and their two children and marry the daughter of King Creon. Medea, after a great speech on the sorrows of women, begs the chorus of Corinthian ladies to aid by silence if she finds any way of revenge. Creon enters and orders her to leave the country with her children. Medea obtains one day's grace and determines on poison as her method of revenge. She has a terrible altercation with Jason who in vain offers her aid in her coming exile. Later, Aegeus, king of Athens, arrives and Medea induces him to swear that if she comes to Athens he will protect her. Sure of a retreat, Medea makes a pretended reconciliation with Jason and persuades him to take the children to his bride that she may allow them to stay in Corinth.

But the gifts they bear are poisoned. The bride and her father die in torment ; Medea, after a terrible soliloquy of agonized indecision, slays her children, and escapes to Athens on a magic chariot.—This is not Euripides' greatest play, but it contains work which he never surpassed. Medea herself is magnificently drawn.



Behind is the citadel of Corinth. In the foreground the early Doric temple of Apollo

In Sophocles the clash of will and emotion, essential to drama, arises from the confrontation of two people, each self-consistent. In *Medea* the conflict rages in a single soul : her tremendous will-power and passion, conflicting with love for her children, dominate the action and give it perfect unity. The other characters, in their degree, are portrayed with delightful mastery ; Jason, in particular, is a marvellous blend of superficial cleverness and spiritual stupidity ; his wife's passionate resentment only impels

him to 'make her see reason'. The literary excellence of the drama is not less splendid. Medea's plan to seek refuge in Athens occasions the amazingly beautiful ode on Attica.

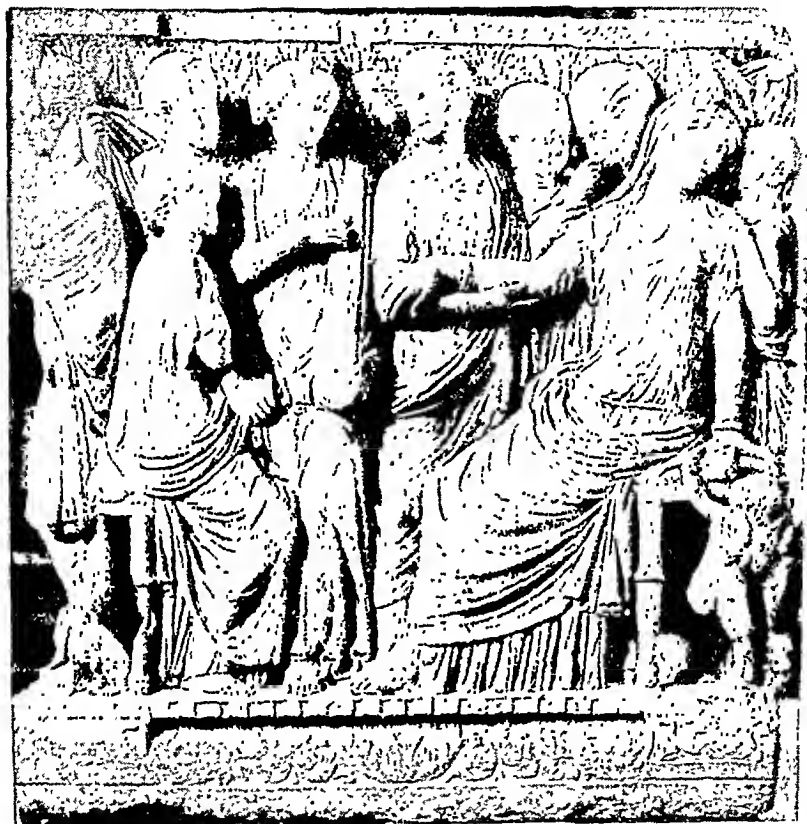
The sons of Erechtheus, the olden,  
 Whom high gods planted of yore  
 In an old land of heaven upholden,  
 A proud land untrodden of war :  
 They are hungered, and, lo, their desire  
 With wisdom is fed as with meat :  
 In their skies is a shining of fire,  
 A joy in the fall of their feet :  
 And thither, with manifold dowers,  
 From the North, from the hills, from the morn,  
 The Muses did gather their powers,  
 That a child of the Nine should be born ;  
 And Harmony, sown as the flowers,  
 Grew gold in the acres of corn.<sup>1</sup>

*Hippolytus* gained the first prize in 428 B.C. The action passes before the house of the Athenian king Theseus. Aphrodite, goddess of love, explains that Theseus's son Hippolytus neglects her for the virgin huntress-deity Artemis: she has, therefore, made Phaedra fall in love with her stepson, so that Theseus may bring about his death. The old Nurse of Phaedra, who is feverishly sick, endeavours to calm her mistress and at length elicits the fact of Phaedra's passion. The queen tells her and the chorus of her fight against temptation: at length she has resolved to refuse food and die. The Nurse skilfully urges that Phaedra should yield, and being repulsed appeals to Hippolytus, who comes forth railing against female morals. Phaedra in despair hangs herself, leaving a letter which incriminates Hippolytus. Theseus returns home and finds this. He appeals to his father, Poseidon the sea-god (who has promised to grant him three prayers), to destroy Hippolytus. There follows a terrible interview between Theseus and his son, in which the latter, bound by his oath to the Nurse, cannot defend

<sup>1</sup> Professor Gilbert Murray.



himself, and is banished. Later, news arrives that the prince is at the point of death: a huge bull, sent by Poseidon, terrified Hippolytus's horses, which bolted and overthrew him. Artemis



The love-sick Phaedra. Sarcophagus at Girgenti

appears and reveals the truth to Theseus; Hippolytus is carried in, is reconciled to his father, and dies.—This is perhaps the greatest Euripidean play, and perhaps the noblest proof in literature that agony and even shame may be revealed by the artist as wells of beauty—not merely invested with charm by being talked about in a charming way, but shown as authentically beautiful by

a noble genius who sees in them functions of life as contrasted with mere existence. So it is that Euripides is as great in presenting the beauty of indulgence as in presenting the beauty of holiness. For the latter, take Hippolytus's address to Artemis (vv. 73-87) :

For thee, my Queen, this garland have I twined  
Of blossoms from that meadow virginal,  
Where neither shepherd dares to graze his flock,  
Nor hath the scythe made entry : yet the bee  
Doth haunt the mead, that voyager of spring,  
'Mid Nature's shyest charm of stream and verdure.  
There may no base man enter ; only he,  
Who, taught by instinct, uninstructed else,  
Hath taken Virtue for his star of life,  
May pluck the flow'rets of that pleasance pure.  
Come, Queen beloved, for thy shining hair  
Accept this wreath from hands of innocence !  
To me alone of all mankind is given  
Converse to hold and company with thee,  
Hearing thy voice, although thy face be hid.  
To the end of life, as now, may I be thine !

And, for the other, read the Nurse's proclamation of Aphrodite, uttered to break Phaedra's resolve (vv. 447-61) :

Amid the sky she walks, amid the surge  
Of the sea-billows. All things live from her.  
The seed is hers and hers the yearning throe  
Whence spring we all that tread the ways of earth.  
Ask them that con the half-forgotten seers  
Of elder time, and serve the Muse themselves.  
They know how Zeus once pined for Semele,  
How for love's sake the Goddess of the Dawn  
Stooped from her radiant sphere to Cephalus  
And stole him to the sky. Yet these abide  
In Heaven, nor shun the converse of the gods,  
Bowing, belike, to conquering circumstance.  
And wilt not *thou* ? Nay, if this law thou spurnest,  
Thy sire, when he begat thee, should have writ  
Some strange indenture signed by gods unknown !

That this advice, as advice, may be wrong is only one consideration. It is not only advice, but a glorious presentation of fact. That realized, we may, we must, go on to consider how it is treated dramatically—what Phaedra makes of it as advice: she rejects it utterly, on the strength of her own conscience, unfortified either by religion or by self-delusion. She is undoubtedly the best-drawn female character in ancient drama, worthy to be set beside Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, and Hedda Gabler. Her treachery to Hippolytus can be perfectly understood only through careful study: the main point is that she has reason to fear he will (equally falsely) denounce her to Theseus or at best make her life a torture.

*Ion* may be tentatively dated at 413 B.C. The scene is laid at Delphi, where the young Ion is a temple-attendant. Years ago, Creusa, the Athenian princess, owing to the violence of the god Apollo, brought forth a child (Ion) who was at once miraculously brought to Delphi. She thought her babe dead, and later married Xuthus. The two come to Delphi to ask for children. Apollo, to establish Ion as future king of Athens, tells Xuthus that the lad is Xuthus's son. Creusa in jealousy seeks to kill Ion, but in Xuthus's absence the youth's real birth is revealed by means of tokens.—The two great features of this drama are: (i) this is the most unmistakable instance of Euripides' attitude towards the popular religion: Apollo is shown as both a scoundrel and a bungler; (ii) on the dramatic side the work is full of delight—the lovely picture of this Greek Samuel, and the melodramatic thrills of Creusa's plot and the recognition-scene.

The *Bacchae* or *Bacchantes* or *Bacchanals* (female followers of the god Bacchus or Dionysus) was produced in 405 B.C., after Euripides' death. Dionysus, the son of Zeus and Semele, daughter of the Theban king Cadmus, after spreading his religion in Asia, has brought his worship to Thebes, disguised as a human prophet. Already the Theban women are revelling upon Mount Cithaeron, filled with the Bacchic frenzy. He goes to join them, and the

chorus of Asiatic women throng in, singing praises of their religion. The aged Cadmus and Tiresias prepare to join the revels, but the young king Pentheus fiercely rebukes them. They depart to Cithaeron, and Pentheus orders the arrest of the Stranger, who is brought in. The king mocks him and drags him off to be imprisoned in the stables. While the chorus express their indignation, the prophet is heard summoning fire and earthquake, and the women joyfully hail the overthrow of the palace. The Stranger comes forth unharmed, followed by Pentheus, upon whom he throws



A Bacchanal in frenzy  
(Palazzo dei Conservatori)

a mysterious feebleness of mind, so that he consents to go, disguised as a woman, and spy upon the Bacchic rites. A messenger reports how the Theban women, led by Agave, Pentheus's own mother, have torn him to pieces. Agave enters in lunatic triumph, carrying her son's head, and is gradually brought to sanity and heartbreak by Cadmus.

Dionysus appears (in a passage now imperfect) and foretells the future of Cadmus: the present woes, he explains, are caused by the will of Zeus.—This magnificent work is more excellent as a poem than as a play. On the dramatic side it is Aeschylean—simple, stark, with no subtlety of character-drawing. It is con-

cerned, not with individual psychology but with mass-psychology, and gives a gloriously vigorous picture of an invading religion, a religion non-Hellenic, springing from ecstatic communion with the wild free life of forest and mountain-side. This spirit Euripides has voiced in lyrics of marvellous beauty and passion.

Hither, O fragrant of Tmolus the Golden,  
Come with the voice of timbrel and drum ;  
Let the cry of your joyance uplift and embolden  
The God of the joy-cry ; O Bacchanals, come !  
With pealings of pipes and with Phrygian clamour,  
On, where the vision of holiness thrills,  
And the music climbs and the maddening glamour,  
With the wild white Maids, to the hills, to the hills !  
Oh, then, like a colt as he runs by a river,  
A colt by his dam, when the heart of him sings,  
With the keen limbs drawn and the fleet foot a-quiver,  
Away the Bacchanal springs !<sup>1</sup>

As in his own time, so to-day, the reputation of Euripides is great but equivocal. Many cannot understand, and therefore suspect or dislike, a man who does several things consummately. Euripides is a tragedian, a lyrist, a wit, a student of religion, natural science, philosophy, politics, rhetoric, sociology, and morals ; it is a sign of the coming disintegration of the Attic spirit that these things are separately visible in his work. Arnold's famous sonnet proclaims that Sophocles 'saw life steadily, and saw it whole' ; Euripides is more conscious of the separate parts than of the unity. He may be called 'decadent' in the sense that the Attic serenity and concentration are not to be seen in him. He belongs to the age of disillusionment which sooner or later impressed itself on men who pondered the villainies of the Peloponnesian War. Euripides was a man of restless mind and extraordinarily wide sympathies, so that he reacted to the war sooner than any one. He is the first exemplar of that cosmopolitan spirit which is marked in Plato and still more in Aristotle.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Gilbert Murray.

of Euripides to rehabilitate himself with the Athenian women. The first (and lost) version of the *Plutus* appeared in 408, and in 405 the *Frogs*, a comparison of Aeschylus and Euripides (to the latter's detriment) which gained the first prize and was produced a second time. In 404 the Peloponnesian War came to an end with the collapse of Athens, and Comedy was profoundly affected. The expense of mounting plays in the old manner could no longer be borne, and the chorus was reduced: there is no parabasis in the last two plays of Aristophanes. We are told, moreover, that a law was passed forbidding attacks on individuals. But the poet's flexible genius survived these blows. In 392 he produced the *Ecclesiazusae* ('Women in Parliament'), a satire on contemporary feminist theories such as we find in Plato's *Republic*. The *Plutus* ('Wealth') in its extant form appeared in 388, and dealt with a redistribution of wealth according to merit. Aristophanes later composed the *Cocalos* and the *Eolosicon* (both lost) in order to launch his son Araros as a comic poet. The date of his death is unknown.

In all, then, we possess eleven comedies, from the forty or forty-four which he is said to have written. Of these the best is the *Birds*, next to which come the *Frogs*, *Clouds*, and *Thesmophoriazusae*. But it would serve no purpose to set out in full the plot of these or any; for, strictly speaking, the 'story of the play' is unimportant. What matters is the one great explosive idea and its brilliant treatment in small scenes and lyrics beautiful or witty. Most of the eleven follow the same scheme. First is propounded a fantastic but highly desirable project, which is carried through by the chief character despite immense difficulties. Then comes the parabasis or address by the chorus to the audience in the poet's name. Finally we have a series of little scenes depicting the beneficent working of the accomplished object, ending with a kind of apotheosis of the hero.

The first element, the governing idea, is perhaps his greatest

work. To say that he composes comedy is not merely to say that he writes amusing passages : a play of Aristophanes is one immense joke in action. He conceives a plan which sets society, or the whole universe, upside down, and logically works out the result. Even if no character uttered a single joke, the whole play would still be a comedy. In the *Acharnians*, Dicacopolis, while Athens



Scene from a comic play. Lady and her land-agent with their account books receive a defaulting peasant

(Photograph F. Bruckmann A.-G. Munchen)

is at war with the Peloponnesians, makes peace on his own account and so enjoys an oasis of happiness and delight in the centre of his harassed country. Peisthetaerus persuades the birds to fortify a great city in the air and dictate terms to men and gods. Dionysus in the *Frogs*, bored by the surviving poetasters of Athens, enters Hades to fetch back Euripides (and returns with Aeschylus). Chremylus, chafing at the unfairness of fortune, cures the blindness of the god of wealth. Trygaeus in the *Peace* flies up to Heaven on a winged beetle, to expostulate with Zeus for destroying Greece,

and then rallies the States to haul up the goddess of Peace from the hole in which she has been buried. The *Ecclesiazusae* shows women in the Athenian parliament—as fantastic a miracle (the poet suggests) as Cloude cuckootown. And the incidental events are conceived in the same manner. Instead of persons standing about and uttering witty or grotesque conversation on politics or marriage, we find visible, acted, jokes. The war is not merely stated to be destroying the Greek cities: the poet shows us the War-Spirit compounding a gigantic salad, throwing into his vast mortar leeks (*Prasiae*), onions (*Megara*), cheese (*Sicily*), honey (*Athens*), and foiled only because the two pestles are missing—Cleon and Brasidas, leaders of the war-party at Athens and Sparta, are dead. In the *Knights* the rival demagogues bid for the People's favour not only with fine speeches, but with dainties and cushions. Peisthetaerus and Euelpides are at first threatened with destruction by the infuriated fowls, but they entrench themselves in their luggage, assuming their pots and spits as armour. Aristophanes keeps the complicated situation vivid by action and a lyric (vv. 386 sqq.) which does justice to the queerly assorted elements of it:

P. Look! Perhaps we *shan't* be slaughtered!

Ground your jug and grip your spear.

Keep the sentries well supported.

Man the Wall of China there!

E. Yes, but if we're drawn and quartered,

Have you booked a tomb, and where?

P. Potters' Quarter shall receive us,

Poor slain heroes out of pain.

In a soldier's grave they'll leave us,

And the colonel won't complain.

We shall tell him—he'll believe us—

Turkey saw our last campaign.

In the *Frogs*, instead of baldly announcing 'Aeschylus' iambics are heavy and majestic, those of Euripides light and rapid', Dionysus



drags out a huge pair of scales ; Aeschylus stands beside one pan, his rival by the other, each shouts a line into this novel receiver, and Euripides' scale kicks the beam emphatically every time.

The parabasis is the great central non-dramatic passage containing (with other elements) an address by the chorus giving the poet's own message or a proclamation of their own claims and merits. In the *Knights*, for example, we find : (i) praise of Aristophanes, with very interesting remarks on other comic dramatists ; (ii) a brilliant little invocation of Poseidon ; (iii) eulogy of ' our fathers ' and their unselfish courage ; (iv) an invocation of Pallas Athene ; (v) eulogy of ' our horses ' and their quaint prowess. The parabasis of the *Birds* is justly celebrated (vv. 685 sqq.) :

Ye men who are dimly existing below, who perish and fade as  
the leaf,  
Pale, woebegone, shadowlike, spiritless folk, life feeble and wingless  
and brief,  
Frail castings of clay, who are gone in a day, like a dream full of  
sorrow and sighing,  
Come listen with care to the Birds of the air, the ageless, the death-  
less, who flying  
In the joy and the freshness of Ether, are wont to muse upon  
wisdom undying.  
We will tell you of things transcendental ; of Springs and of Rivers  
the mighty upheaval ;  
The nature of Birds ; and the birth of the Gods ; and of Chaos  
and Darkness primeval.  
When this ye shall know, let old Prodicus go, and be hanged without  
hope of reprieve.  
There was Chaos at first, and Darkness, and Night, and Tartarus  
vasty and dismal ;  
But the Earth was not there, nor the Sky, nor the Air, till at length  
in the bosom abysmal  
Of Darkness an egg, from the whirlwind conceived, was laid by  
the sable-plumed Night,

And out of that egg, as the Seasons revolved, sprang Love, the  
entrancing, the bright,  
Love brilliant and bold with his pinions of gold, like a whirlwind,  
refulgent and sparkling!  
Love hatched us, commingling in Tartarus wide, with Chaos, the  
murky, the darkling,  
And brought us above, as the firstlings of love, and first to the  
light we ascended.  
There was never a race of Immortals at all till Love had the  
universe blended;  
Then all things commingling together in love, there arose the  
fair Earth, and the Sky,  
And the limitless Sea; and the race of the Gods, the Blessed, who  
never shall die.<sup>1</sup>

The third phase which we noted is the pageant-like representation of the benefits conferred by the triumph of the hero's purpose. In the *Peace* Trygaeus is interrupted in his festive preparations by manufacturers of farming implements and of weapons, who have found prosperity and ruin respectively in the sudden cessation of war. In the *Birds* a number of intrusive busybodies attempt to gain profit from the 'openings' provided by the foundation of the new city—a poet, an oracle-seller, a town-planning expert, a dealer in ready-made laws. This section is punctuated by brief choric songs, often vigorous abuse of 'local characters'. So in the *Acharnians* (801 sqq.) :

Our friend is in clover!  
The scene that 's just over  
Has shown that he wove a  
Most elegant plot.  
In the market reclining,  
His pockets he 's lining;  
For rivals combining  
He cares not a jot. . . .

<sup>1</sup> B. B. Rogers.

Pauson, vilest of creatures,  
 Shan't libel your features ;  
 Lysistratus' screeches  
     No more shall you hear.  
 He's a snipe of the gutter,  
 A criminal utter,  
 Who smells bread and butter  
     Not once in a year !

But the scheme shows variety. In some dramas the third phase is not a mere succession of expository scenes, but tends to be more dramatic—to carry 'the story' on ; even so, however, the action is always more static here. The *Knights* has a series of scenes, but they are a succession of competitions between the same persons, Cleon and the sausage-seller, who seek by their gifts to win the favour of Demos. Similarly, but with greater power, the *Frogs* exhibits competition between Aeschylus and Euripides with regard to their prologues, their lyrics, &c. Best of all on this side is the *Thesmophoriazusae*, where Mnesilochus (disguised as a woman in order to champion Euripides before the ladies of Athens, but detected, tied up, and placed under the guard of a richly comic policeman) is adroitly rescued by Euripides himself. It is interesting to note that even here 'the scheme' is faintly represented by preliminary failures on the rescuer's part.

Aristophanes is a poet of ideas, not of psychology. There is little character-drawing throughout his work : his invented people are ordinary, though they move in fantastic surroundings. What of his 'historical characters'—his presentation of distinguished real persons—Cleon, Socrates, Lamachus, Euripides? We know from other sources something about all these, and conclude that the poet is wildly burlesquing them. About Socrates we know a very great deal, and though the pictures painted by Xenophon and Plato differ, they both show a saint, a sage, a man of the world ; Aristophanes depicts a conceited pretentious swindler. The explanation of this 'incorrectness' is not simple. First, fantastic

attacks upon distinguished men were a part of the general licence allowed to writers of the Old Comedy. Second, he is assailing a whole class—the Sophists, with whom it was possible on some grounds to confuse Socrates, and at the head of whom he is therefore placed, being not only eminent, but also ‘a character’. The dramatist knew as well as we that Socrates studied neither fleas nor thunder. Finally, our notions about good taste, slander, fairness in attack, and so forth existed at Athens only in rudimentary form at any season of the year, still less at the Dionysiac festivals. Here the opportunity may be taken to remark that Aristophanes is one of the most indecent writers in the world.

His favourite topics have now mostly been mentioned. Two at least should be added: his praise of the old order, and his love of country-life. Nothing could be more charming than his picture (*Knights*, 1313 sqq.) of the rejuvenated Demos and the return of the good old days, or the tender and delicate description (*Clouds*, 992 sqq.) of the old-time simple-hearted young athlete ‘rejoicing in the season of spring, when the plane-tree whispers to the elm’. When he dwells upon rural life, his delightful and natural poetry may be called Hesiod *plus* the Athenian democratic spirit.

Ah, there’s nothing half so sweet as when the seed is in the ground,  
 God a gracious rain is sending, and a neighbour saunters round.  
 ‘O Comarchides!’ he hails me: ‘how shall we enjoy the hours?  
 Drinking seems to suit my fancy, what with these benignant showers.  
 Therefore let three quarts, my mistress, of your kidney-beans be fried,  
 Mix them nicely up with barley, and your choicest figs provide;  
 Syra run and shout to Manes, call him in without delay,  
 ’Tis no time to stand and dawdle pruning out the vines to-day,  
 Nor to break the clods about them, now the ground is soaking through.  
 Bring me out from home the fieldfare, bring me out the siskins two,

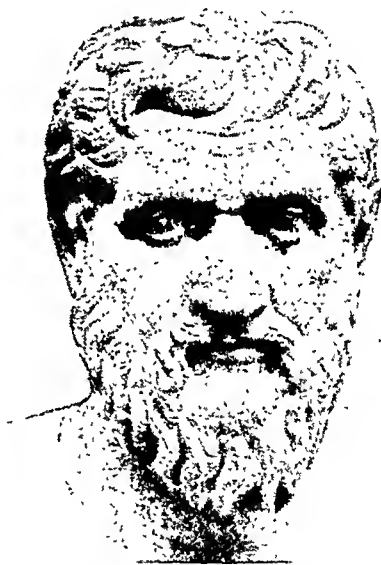
This genius of brilliant invention, farcical stage-craft, and intellectual zest is also a glorious lyric poet. There is nothing in Greek to surpass the throbbing loveliness of the song (*Birds*, 209 sqq.) wherewith the Hoopoe summons the Nightingale :

Awake, my mate !  
Shake off thy slumbers, and clear and strong  
Let loose the floods of thy glorious song,  
The sacred dirge of thy mouth divine  
For sore-wept Itys, thy child and mine ;  
Thy tender trillings his name prolong  
With the liquid note of thy tawny throat ;  
Through the leafy curls of the woodbine sweet  
The pure sound mounts to the heavenly seat,  
And Phoebus, lord of the golden hair,  
As he lists to thy wild plaint echoing there,  
Draws answering strains from his ivoried lyre,  
Till he stirs the dance of the heavenly choir,  
And calls from the blessed lips on high  
Of immortal Gods, a divine reply  
To the tones of thy witching melody.<sup>1</sup>

Only one other comic dramatist can fitly be compared with Aristophanes. Menander (if we may judge from his copious fragments) made plays of commonplace people, obvious plots, dialogue miraculously supple, elegant, and witty. Molière uses very simple plots and persons but slightly individualized ; his greatness consists in consummate dialogue conveying social satire. Terence shows beautiful ingenuity in the construction of plots whose details are commonplace ; he has exquisite dialogue, and perfect character-drawing in quiet colours. Aristophanes is far greater than these splendid masters of the Comedy of Manners. Shakespeare alone is his equal. Against the *Clouds* we may set the immortal meeting after the Gadshill robbery. Shakespeare's equivalent for the religion of Dinos is the figure of Falstaff. The Greek invents glorious situations, the Englishman glorious persons.

<sup>1</sup> Rogers.

trines attributed to him can scarcely be regarded as in that sense authentic. Their chronology is difficult, but the following facts seem certain. (i) The 'Socratic' dialogues are early—that is, those which give a true representation of the manner and theories of the historic Socrates. (ii) The *Republic* belongs to the opening of the Fourth Century, since the *Ecclesiazusae* of Aristophanes (392 B.C.) probably refers to it. (iii) The *Laws* is the latest, since Plato left it incomplete and it was published by his pupil Philip of Opus. It is also probable: (i) that works like the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, because of their matter as well as their style, belong to the philosopher's earlier life, perhaps a little before the *Republic*; (ii) that the *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Philebus*, in view of their style, scientific manner, and constructive quality, should be placed late.



PLATO (Holkham head)

Plato is at once the greatest thinker and the greatest writer of antiquity. If we set down separately the main features of his work as a philosopher and as a master of prose, it must be borne in mind that these two activities can be sundered only in theory: his style is an elucidation of his philosophy; his doctrines mould his language.

The Platonic philosophy is the consummation of all earlier

Greek thought. Heraclitus held that all is flux: nothing is, everything becomes; Parmenides, that nothing exists save a nebulous entity that transcends illusory phenomena; Empedocles, that Love and Strife alternately and gradually combine and sever the four elements; Anaxagoras, that Mind originates the stir which creates phenomena; the Atomists, that empty space exists; the Pythagoreans, that the Universe is made of numbers. This apparently chaotic divergence of philosophical schools induced distrust of all such inquiry. As a result, the Sophists gave themselves to practical training in rhetoric, politics, literature, and other arts; while Socrates rejecting, like them, transcendental studies, concentrated upon man and his improvement by clear thinking and the acquisition of general concepts. Plato, by the most audacious, most magnificent, and most profound triumph which human intellect ever achieved, produced a gigantic synthesis and reconciliation of all these dissident doctrines and methods. The core of his system is the Theory of Ideas. The particular oak, man, or nightingale has no valid independent being; what truly exists is the Idea of Oak, of Man, of Nightingale. This Idea is beyond matter, a specific Mode of Existence, which by being carried out in matter engenders the natural kind appropriate to it—the class called men or oaks. The Idea is itself derived from God, the foundation of all existence; the world of Ideas is God's mind as articulately thinking. These Ideas, each by itself, are the proper study of man; the only object of real knowledge. We cannot know a particular mouse or rose; knowledge is of the qualities common to all mice alike, all roses alike, in virtue of which qualities we use those names. For knowledge is something permanently trustworthy, and what we call knowledge of the particular thing as such is not knowledge, but mere opinion—it concerns features transitory and so unknowable, precisely as Heraclitus saw. The particular mouse pursued by the farmer's wife may lose its tail: as a recognizable individual it changes, but as a member of the

class 'mouse' it does not. The gardeners of *Alice in Wonderland* caused trouble in that particular case when they painted the white roses red, but they made no difference to the science of botany.

What Plato firmly seized, then, is the validity of the natural kind. He is following the route opened up by Socrates who always insisted: 'I do not wish you to give me instances of just (holy, beautiful, &c.) things, but to say what you mean by Justice (Holiness, &c.) itself.' Socrates sought always the informing concept. The immense advance made by Plato was to regard this concept as an independent existence, the immaterial Idea, which man studies by examining its reproduction in matter, the natural kind. The particular members of that natural kind differ simply because matter (that is, time-and-space conditions) is an ingredient in them. It is because of this ingredient that each fails to mirror the Idea perfectly, and this failure is what we call Evil. But though no particular represents the Idea perfectly, it does represent it, so that the whole collection of particulars by its uniform characteristics does mirror the Idea perfectly. Thus the only (though immense) difference between the Idea and the natural kind is that the former is immaterial and therefore one, the latter material and therefore multiple. This magnificent theory is the foundation of all the sciences.

But how can we detect the natural kinds, how distinguish between categories made by Nature, and categories made by man for his own convenience (e. g. quadruped, banker), how recognize the Idea? Plato answers the question by his doctrine of *Anamnesis*,



SOCRATES  
(Evans Collection)



or Recollection. 'This again is Socratic. Socrates called himself a midwife, claiming that he never imparted truth but only helped others to bring forth the truth which was in them. 'The best example of the 'Socratic Method' is in the *Meno*, where Socrates causes a slave, apparently ignorant of geometry, to evolve under question, not instruction, the method of constructing a square whose area is twice that of a given square. It follows that knowledge is innate. Before birth, Plato holds, our souls had vision of the Ideas themselves in the supernal world, and though the vision has faded we yet retain fragments of it which wake to life when we are confronted by traces of the Ideas in our world. It is this noble conception which Wordsworth has expressed in his 'Immortal Ode'. Plato, too, looked on Anamnesis as a proof of personal immortality. But whereas Wordsworth, profoundly distrusting reason and scientific inquiry, writes that the vision 'fades into the light of common day' as we leave childhood behind, Plato believes that by science, reason, and experience the vision returns upon us stronger and more definite.

It will be observed that his explanation of the universe, his notion of human development, seem to rest exclusively upon reason—that the emotional side of God and Man is apparently neglected. It is true, speaking quite generally, that Plato does assign less importance to religion than to philosophy, although the two merge into one another. It is true also that the element in Socrates' influence upon him which abode longest was the master's immense intellectual sincerity and power. But Plato's career lasted for sixty years, and the extremely brief account above given is an attempt to distil the essence of his completed doctrine, which varied not only in tenor but even more in the manner of its presentation. And at first the influence of Socrates was felt quite as strongly by his heart as by his brain. The most famous passage in his writings is that noble description in the *Phaedo* of his master's death.

‘The servant of the Eleven came, and standing beside him said : “Socrates, I shall not complain of you as of the rest, who invoke angry curses upon me when I give them the word to drink the poison at command of the magistrates. You I have found throughout this time the most noble, gentle, and good of all that ever came here, and now again, I am sure, you will not be angry with me, since you know I am not to blame, but with those who are. So now—you know what message I have brought—farewell, and try to bear with all patience what must be.” With the words he burst into tears, turned his back, and went out. . . . After saying this, Socrates placed the cup to his lips and with perfect composure and cheerfulness drank the potion. Now, up to that moment most of us had been tolerably successful in restraining our tears, but when we saw him drink and finish the draught, it was no longer so ; as for me, the tears came in streams, do what I would, so that I covered my head and bemoaned myself—not Socrates, but my own fate and the loss of such a friend.’

Stirred to his depths emotionally, the greatest pupil of Socrates gives in his earlier dialogues magnificent proof that he understands how emotion can aid reason in the spiritual development of man. This is seen in those superb ‘myths’, allegorical pictures of the glory or punishment awaiting us after death, or the illumination vouchsafed by the gods to our souls before birth : in the *Phaedrus* his similitude of the mind as a charioteer driving two winged steeds, one striving upwards, the other earthwards ; the grim scene of judgement in the *Gorgias* ; at the close of the *Republic* the story of Er, son of Armenius, who was left for dead on the battle-field but revived on the twelfth day and related all that he had seen in the lower world. But Plato’s most glorious and beautiful achievement in this province is to be found in the *Symposium*, the account of a drinking-party given by Agathon to celebrate his victory in the tragic competition. It is suggested that, instead of the usual entertainment by a hired performer, the guests shall successively speak the praises of Love. When his turn comes, Socrates recites the account which he alleges was given to

him by one Diotima, a woman of Mantinea. This begins by a charming prose-poem of Eros's birth from Poverty and Means, then a description follows of Love's true function—to bring forth offspring 'in the beautiful', but offspring spiritual, not only of the flesh. Indeed the noble way of Love is spiritual communion. And so she depicts the great ascent (210 A-212 A) :

'For this is the true way of entering or being led into the ways of Love—to begin with these beauties and ever in quest of that Beauty to mount as it were the rungs of a ladder, from one to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful habits, and from beautiful habits to beautiful studies, until from those studies you reach that final study which contemplates naught save Beauty itself.'

The function, she says at the close, is to beget true virtue ; and Socrates adds that in his belief human nature cannot easily find a better co-worker than Eros in the quest for virtue and immortality. It is perhaps the finest achievement of his unparalleled genius that Plato, instead of ignoring or palliating the special and extreme form of Greek sensuality, contrives by his transmuting clarity of passion and intellectual fire to make the instinct on which it rests a means, and the best means, to true philosophy. Later in life his feeling changes ; this is his more glorious *Endymion*.

Amidst the buzz which arises when Socrates has ended, an uproar is heard, and the sedate party is interrupted by a band of revellers led by the beautiful son of Cleinias, Athens' darling and her bane, Alcibiades himself. Learning the subject of discussion, he insists on giving an encomium of Socrates.

'When we hear any one else, even a masterly orator, delivering his own speech, none of us greatly cares. But when any one hears you, or your words reported by another (perhaps a very indifferent speaker); whether the auditor is man, woman, or child, we are startled and spellbound. For my part, gentlemen, it is only the fear that you will think me even more drunk than I am that

prevents me from telling you on my oath the effect that this man's words have had on me, yes, and still have. When I hear him, my heart throbs and my tears flow at his words more violently than those of the Corybants; and I see that many others share my experience. When I heard Pericles and other good orators, I thought they spoke well, but nothing of this kind happened to me: my heart was not filled with distress and revolt against my degraded condition. But this Marsyas has often used me so that I have thought life not worth living unless I changed my ways.'

But though such was the effect of Socrates upon some hearers, his most definite doctrine was the iciest assertion of paramount reason that any teacher has ever promulgated—the famous law that 'No man is willingly evil'. Virtue, he maintained, was knowledge; if a man does wrong, it is through intellectual error: he always intends to do right, but is mistaken as to what is right. This extraordinary view has been plausibly explained by Socrates' own consummate self-control—it was apparently true for him, if for no one else. Plato, however, takes it over and (in his earlier period) constantly writes as if to make men good it is only needful to persuade them. Another important and natural fact is that as he grew older he was himself less mindful of emotion. His later dialogues are austere in tone, rigidly scientific in manner: the discussion in the *Parmenides* of the different sorts of non-existence is as lacking in thrills as anything in Aristotle himself. But, again, these constructive dialogues are intended for his own advanced pupils. The whole mass of his work, then, shows reason as the main instrument of human development, emotion as a valuable ally and sometimes as the sole help where reason fails. So in *Phaedrus*, 256 B, 'human self-mastery' and 'divine madness' (what we call 'inspiration') are joined as the two ways to perfection.

Throughout his life Plato holds the same view of what is best for mankind: 'to become and be as good as possible so long as they live' (*Laws*, 707 D). To secure this is the aim of politics, social

organization, art, education, religion. All these, and philosophy itself, are dealt with in the *Republic*, his most famous and perhaps his greatest, most beautiful, and most fully characteristic work. It takes its name<sup>1</sup> from the fact that Socrates and his friends, attempting to define justice, feel that they must see it working on a large scale, and so construct an imaginary perfect state. Just as in the soul there are three parts, the intellect, the will, and the appetites, so in the Republic are three classes, the guardians who rule, the auxiliaries or citizen-soldiers who carry out the guardians' bidding, and the ordinary citizens, who carry on farming, manufactures, and the like. Among these the four great Greek virtues are divided—wisdom marks the guardians, valour the auxiliaries, self-control the industrialists, and justice (which is found to mean that 'everyone performs his own function') is common to the whole nation.

The guardians go through an elaborate training which culminates in 'dialectic' or the study of Ideas. They rule by philosophy.

'Unless the philosophers become kings in the Greek cities, or those now called kings and potentates practise genuine and adequate philosophy, so that political power and philosophy are identified while the majority of those characters which now proceed to each separately are excluded therefrom, there is no cessation of misery, my dear Glaucon, for the cities, nor (I fancy) for the human race; and this state which we have now described in theory will never before that day be born into the region of the possible and see the light of the sun' (473 D).

He recognizes that many will ridicule this belief, and he himself failed at Syracuse. When his desire was fully realized in Marcus Aurelius, the results to human happiness were small; and it is significant from several points of view that the Stoic Emperor persecuted the Christians. But Plato is convinced that his reform

<sup>1</sup> 'Republic' is used in the Latin sense of 'commonwealth', 'body politic'. There is no anti-monarchical intention, though as a matter of fact Plato's Republic has no king.

is the only cure for the maladies of civilization, and sets himself to eradicate, or rather exclude, from the Republic any element, however familiar hitherto, which would threaten the complete realization of his principle.

The aim being that his state should be genuinely united, he forbids his guardians and auxiliaries those two interests which create private ambitions and minor loyalties—the family and property. His rulers must have no individual possessions. All meals are to be taken in public messes. Wives and children are to be common to all, so that each youth may regard all men and women of a certain age with an equal filial respect. The women are to be educated precisely like the men and to perform the same duties, even of warfare. Plato recognizes no difference whatever, save in physical strength, between the sexes. Astounding as this was in fourth-century Athens, Plato is yet a typical Athenian in regarding women as ‘men minus  $\alpha$ ’;  $\alpha$  is a far smaller quantity for him than for Thucydides—that is all, much though it is. The only exception to this Athenian rule is Euripides.

Another famous enactment is the exclusion of the hitherto recognized poets. They all, Homer in chief, write excellently but not for edification, since they depict such great heroes as Achilles yielding to hysterical emotion. They must make way for poets who will put such morals into their works as ‘we’ desire, and in sign of our respectful regret ‘we shall send them away to another city pouring myrrh over their heads and crowning them with wool’ (398 A). This short way with poetic genius may cause us to smile, but that is because among us—rightly, maybe—poetry is privileged. In the interests of education many to-day would have government keep a firm hand upon town-planning, architecture, and the cinematograph; and they would have Plato with them.

‘Other craftsmen must we seek, whose genius will set them on the track of essential beauty and grace, so that dwelling (as it were) in a healthy region the young may gain benefit from every quarter,

whence influence from beautiful works may enter their eyes or ears, like a breeze bearing health from wholesome regions, and from their infancy may insensibly lead them to resemble and love and attune themselves to Reason in its beauty' (401 c).

Plato would have thought it useless to 'train taste' by showing pictures of Venice to infants in a squalid mill-town. These words are the immortal proclamation of the one thing most needful in the education of children. As for systematic training later, we find at the beginning of the Seventh Book his celebrated allegory of the Cave, where prisoners sit able to see nothing but shadows, to hear echoes only, until they are released and caused to turn round, gazing upon the objects themselves and at length upon the sun which makes them and their shadows visible.

Though we may protest that no human beings would endure a government so uncompromisingly 'paternal', we are not likely to conceive any great bitterness against Plato as a tyrant, for never was the sword of steel encased in a scabbard of such gloriously embroidered velvet. There is no appeal to religion or morals, taste or intellect, no charm of wit, fancy, or exquisite phrase which he has not employed to win our dazzled assent to his prohibitions. But in the *Laws*, the immense dialogue written some forty years later to portray another ideal state, the smiling though firm paternal government has become a coldly ferocious tyranny. This is the most terrible book in Greek literature. At the end of his glorious career, the greatest man who ever devoted his life to constructive contemplation and teaching shows himself bent on binding chains about the human spirit. The disciple who wrote the *Phaedo* has become the inquisitor who would have joined in the indictment of Socrates. There is nothing in the history of philosophy or letters to compare with this appalling collapse.

It is partly that Plato is tired, tired after sixty years' toil of the invincible moral stupidity of his fellows. That the *Laws* are a huge book by no means disproves this: he was a practised writer, if

ever man was, and he goes on writing just as tired children go on talking. In the Seventh Book occurs a notable sign of jaded disillusionment. 'Human affairs do not deserve great seriousness



PLATO'S CAVE ON HYMETTUS

*'The Cave, where prisoners sit able to see nothing but shadows'*

but seriousness they do demand—which is unfortunate. . . . The human being, as we said before, is the mechanically constructed plaything of God . . . and all men and women should pass their lives in executing the most beautiful play possible' (803 B). It is weariness again that has destroyed his faith in his own great



doctrine—the core of the *Timaeus*—that the one perfect God sums up in himself the whole Universe : he now makes the terrible statement, that there are two souls which rule the world of motion and the heavens alike, one working good, the other evil (896 E). So thinking, he has evolved something new to him and new to all Greeks, the conception of religious orthodoxy—there is valid Evil in the world, from which souls must be saved by true belief ; and virtue becomes identified with conformity. Plato is now a religious fanatic and propagandist (888). The passionate desire to save souls evokes the desperate, perilous, yet noble cry that, failing a revelation from Heaven, it is necessary for him to stand forth as a prophet, utterly alone.

‘The things vital and hard to make acceptable are most truly a task for God, if it were by any means possible that commands concerning them should be received from him ; failing this, they need some courageous man who, honouring freedom of speech supremely, shall utter what he thinks best for city and citizens, enjoining upon corrupt souls what is meet and in conformity to the whole constitution, contradicting the mightiest appetites and having no man for his helper, alone following Reason alone.’ (835 B).

*Corruptio optimi pessima.* Plato is not content with this : to the prophet’s fervour he joins the powers of a ruler and that lust for conformity in all things which is the besetting temptation of all organizers. So it is that we come to his blackest conception, a Greek Holy Inquisition.

‘Similarly, to believe the gods indifferent begets two other classes, and to believe them open to prayer another two. Of these so divergent, those guided by folly, with no innate evil disposition and character, the judge, acting by law, shall place in the house of correction for not less than five years. During this time no citizen shall associate with them except the members of the Nocturnal Council, visiting them for admonition and the salvation of their souls. When the time of their imprisonment has expired, any of them who is deemed righteous shall dwell with the righteous ;

otherwise, if anyone is a second time condemned on such a charge, he shall be punished with death. As for those brutishly addicted to the belief that the gods are indifferent, or that they are open to prayer—those who despising mankind employ wizardry upon many of the living, claiming magic power over the dead and promising to persuade the gods, as using jugglery of sacrifices, prayers, and spells, and seek to bring utter ruin upon individuals, whole families, and cities for the sake of gain—of these whosoever is deemed guilty, the Court shall direct that according to law he be confined in the underground prison, that no free man shall come to him, but that nourishment fixed by the law-guardians shall be given to them by the attendants. When he dies, he shall be cast out beyond the frontier unburied' (908 E).

The *Lacus* are the only genuine work of Plato in which Socrates takes no part. We have travelled far from the bright early days of unfettered genial converse, a change marked for us by the similarity and the difference between the *mise en scène* of the *Phaedrus* and the *Lacus*. Both dialogues pass in the country among trees, the *Phaedrus* in a 'lovely bower' beneath a spreading plane and a towering poplar, the *Lacus* in a shady resting-place under lofty trees, where it is meet for 'men of our age' to rest often by the way. But in the later dialogue the halt is beside 'a distinctly sacred highway' leading from Cnossus to the cave of Zeus—from the centre of primeval non-Hellenic empire to the grim cavern of the mysterious priest-king—while in the earlier work Socrates and his friend sit and bathe their feet in a cool brook near a shrine of the Nymphs, and recline upon a delightful grassy slope: 'the fragrance of the spot is charming and very sweet.'

One reason has now appeared for the often-felt difficulty of extracting a definite system from Plato's works: a man of prodigious mental power and of equal versatility, growing throughout these sixty years, he naturally presents many facets, and each of us lesser men is more engrossed by some than by others. There is another reason. Plato is a great artist as well as a great thinker, and as such often avoids systematic presentation. Why does he employ the

doctrine—the core of the *Timaeus*—that the one perfect God sums up in himself the whole Universe : he now makes the terrible statement, that there are two souls which rule the world of motion and the heavens alike, one working good, the other evil (896 E). So thinking, he has evolved something new to him and new to all Greeks, the conception of religious orthodoxy—there is valid Evil in the world, from which souls must be saved by true belief ; and virtue becomes identified with conformity. Plato is now a religious fanatic and propagandist (888). The passionate desire to save souls evokes the desperate, perilous, yet noble cry that, failing a revelation from Heaven, it is necessary for him to stand forth as a prophet, utterly alone.

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One reason has now appeared for the often-felt difficulty of extracting a definite system from Plato's works: a man of prodigious mental power and of equal versatility, growing throughout these sixty years, he naturally presents many facets, and each of us lesser men is more engrossed by some than by others. There is another reason. Plato is a great artist as well as a great thinker, and as such often avoids systematic presentation. Why does he employ the

dialogue-form at all? Because he realizes that education is not the communication of facts, but enlightenment conveyed by the impact of one personality upon another. Oral instruction is best, and if he must write in order to reach a wider public, then his written work must imitate oral instruction. He seeks to show people how they may train themselves, and so his dialogues contain temporary mistakes, digressions, negative results. In the *Sophist* and a few other books he does indeed give a rigorously scientific demonstration, e. g. of the method of dichotomy; but the greater part of his work is concerned with thrilling expeditions in chase of a very game quarry across country full of thickets, ravines, and sudden vistas. In such dialogues one often meets logical fallacies: scientifically the *Protagoras* is unsatisfactory; artistically it is a gorgeous masterpiece.

The literary style of Plato is among the major glories of Greek literature. But, in fact, he has not *a* style: he has many. Shakespeare has been called 'myriad-minded', and the word is hardly less applicable to Plato, the most perfect master of variation in manner. First, he is a consummate parodist. Not only do we read in the *Phaedrus* an imitation of Lysias so perfect that some moderns have supposed the passage a genuine composition of that orator; the *Protagoras* contains delightful parodies of the great sophists assembled in Callicles' house—Prodicus, Hippias, and Protagoras himself; Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* is a marvellous reproduction, not of the poet's style but (more difficult) of his imaginative process. Then, for Plato's own manner, his skill in accommodating verbal method to subject is well-nigh miraculous. The *Euthydemus*, for instance, is a light *exposé* of the more frivolous sophists, here confronted by one Ctesippus, a deliciously uncivil and sensible person who has affinity with Oliver Wendell Holmes' 'young man called John'. Dionysodorus, in true sophistic fashion, after showing Ctesippus that 'the dog is *your* dog' and 'the dog is *father* of his pups', argues 'Then you

beat your father'. To which the youth replies: 'Well, I should be much more justified in beating your father for taking it into his head to have such clever sons.' At the other end of the scale is the august and hieratic address of the Creator to his sons (*Timaeus*, 41):

'Gods of gods, whose creator am I and father of works, which being made through me are imperishable by will of mine: aught that is bound may be loosed, nevertheless to will the loosing of what hath beautiful structure and fair existence is an evil thought. Wherefore, since ye have been born, ye are not immortal nor imperishable altogether, nevertheless ye shall not be dissolved nor meet the portion of death, having received in my will a greater bond and more masterful than those wherewith at birth ye were bound together.'

Between these extremes lie every grade and kind of prose excellence—the plain athletic skill of the *Apology*, the austere precision of the *Parmenides*, the coloured magnificence of the *Republic*, the diffuse urbanity of the *Protagoras*, the adolescent grace of the *Charmides*, the delicate satire of the *Ion*, the oratorical suppleness of the *Menexenus*, the intoxicating splendour of the *Symposium*, the sombre formalism of the *Laws*, the passionate righteousness of the *Phaedo*. It is given to no other man that he should compass both the quaint charm of Lamb and the passion of John Knox. It was not enough that as a thinker he should invent science: as an imaginative writer he overpasses the accustomed bounds of humanity. The limits of time and space grow thin and nebulous around him until in his highest moments of exaltation they vanish. Then, it would seem, he sees everything, understands everything. That he foresees Christ is well known: 'In these circumstances the Just Man will be scourged, racked, thrown into chains; he will have his eyes burnt out, and after enduring every pain he will be crucified' (*Republic*, 361 E). The passage in the *Symposium* (223 D), where Agathon and Aristophanes are compelled to admit that a tragic poet is capable also of comedy, has been called

a prophecy of Shakespeare. However that may be, the anticipation of the Holy Office in the *Laws* is amazing. The vision of the Roman Empire occurs, it is true, in a spurious letter (353 E), but that of the Kingdom of Heaven is the culmination of the *Republic* itself (592 A, B) :

“Well”, he said, “if that is his care, he will not engage in politics.” “Yes, by Dog,<sup>1</sup> he will, indeed”, I answered, “in his own city, that is, though perhaps not in the country of his birth, except by miracle.” “I understand”, he said. “You mean the city which we just now described ourselves as founding—the city planted in imagination, for I conceive it is nowhere on earth.” “Well”, I replied, “in heaven there is perhaps a pattern of it stored up for any man who wishes to see it and, seeing it, to become a citizen thereof. Whether it exists anywhere now or in the future, matters nothing ; for in that city alone will he live, and not another.”

## IO

### *Aristotle*

ARISTOTLE was born in 384 B. C. at Stagira, a Greek colony on the Macedonian coast near Mount Athos. His father, Nicomachus, was the physician of Amyntas II, king of Macedonia. In 367 Aristotle went to Athens and studied under Plato till the latter's death in 347 ; he then removed to Atarneus in Asia Minor, where he married Pythias, the niece of his fellow-student Hermias, tyrant of Atarneus. In 342 Philip of Macedonia summoned him to Pella as the tutor of his fourteen-year-old son Alexander, who later assisted Aristotle's researches with funds and zoological specimens. When Alexander set forth to Asia in 335, Aristotle returned to Athens where he founded a school, called the Lyceum

<sup>1</sup> Socrates' favourite expletive.

because situated on ground sacred to Apollo Lyceus. In the morning he would treat the more difficult subjects with his pupils ; later in the day he gave set lectures to a larger audience on more popular topics. From his habit of walking up and down (*peripatēin*) at the morning discussions, Aristotle's school and system became known as the Peripatetic. In 323 he left Athens because of the anti-Macedonian outbreak which followed Alexander's death, and menaced the life of that prince's friend ; he died at Chalcis in 322.

Though it would be absurd to omit Aristotle from even the most summary account of Greek literature, we must realize that the extant writings, though of immense importance, possess (strictly as literature) small value.

Not only are 'fine passages' rare ; Aristotle is usually dry, and often exceedingly



ARISTOTLE

The Vienna head. (Photograph Mansell)

difficult. This is not merely because such themes as psychology and metaphysics are themselves recondite. Plato's *Timaeus* is difficult only in exact proportion to the profundity of its subject. But what are we to make of a writer who says : ' If there is an Essence of Man, is there a different Essence of White Man ? Well, let us call him Shirt ' (1029 b 27) ? Further, the arrangement is often muddled. The reason for all this is largely historical. Aristotle seems often to have based his published work on his own lectures ;



naturally, therefore, they contain repetitions, curt remarks which need amplification, and statements of doctrine which vary in content or emphasis. Moreover, what he wrote has undergone much editing in antiquity, separate treatises being combined into loosely-knit wholes by later Peripatetics. It is often said that our texts are the lecture-notes taken by pupils: this is probably true of some passages. That Aristotle could write lucidly and well was plain to ancient readers (e. g. Cicero) from his popular dialogues and other works, which have perished.

The greatness of Aristotle has three main elements: philosophic power, immense learning, superb common sense. As for the first, he challenges Plato as an equal, and however strongly one may deny that equality, he offers at least important and convincing criticisms of Platonic doctrine; his own theories formed the basis and much of the structure for philosophy throughout the Middle Ages. As for the second, his vast researches into every sphere of knowledge then available are full of illumination to-day, often as to mere facts, always as to the proper method and spirit of research. As for the third, he has the priceless ability to see where one topic ends and another begins: he is the legislator of the sciences, refusing to be baffled or disheartened by their inevitable shading-off. He abounds in definitions, statements, enumerations reasoned and careful, but crisp and encouraging. Despite the accidental difficulty of much that has come down to us, he is, of all great thinkers, nearest to the ordinary man. He regularly begins an investigation by collecting current and traditional opinions; he loves to cut out a subject, put it in a frame, and 'take it in' unharassed by poetical half-lights or irrelevant topics; he loves definitions and the sense of getting on with his task. Above all, he loves knowledge for its own sake, and 'all men have an instinctive yearning for knowledge', as he says at the opening of the *Metaphysics*. These qualities naturally made him the great secular teacher of Medieval Europe—the master of those who

know', as Dante calls him. And the men of those days, in their direct medieval manner, acted upon their faith. 'Aristotle's opinion . . . that there may be no great distance between Spain and India by the Western Ocean was one of the chief causes which sent Columbus upon his voyage of discovery.'<sup>1</sup> It is not too much to say that for centuries European thought was influenced as deeply by Aristotle as by Christianity, and Spenser's great line, 'For soul is form, and doth the body make,' Hamlet's sad gibe to his mother, 'You must have sense, else would you not have motion,' Marlowe's quaint use of 'the essential form of marble stone' in *Tamburlaine*, are but random examples of Aristotelian influence upon an England which was leaving the Middle Ages behind. Nor do his merits end here: he could teach others how to think and how to research. His pupils at the Lyceum were set to the collection of the huge materials which he needed for his biological, historical, and other works. Thus the *Constitution of Athens* (discovered in 1890) is apparently one of a hundred and fifty-eight treatises prepared with a view to the *Politics*; and the information found in manuscripts of tragedies and comedies, as to the date, &c., of the several plays, is derived from his lost 'book', the *Didascaliae*. His biological work is based on facilities of money and personal service set at his disposal by Alexander—the first example in history of the endowment of research.

In the *Organon* (the general name for his works on logic) Aristotle worked unaided: he invents, develops, elaborates, and expounds an entirely new science—how to reason correctly. But in the main his method is, first to define the subject he proposes to treat—in the Third Book of the *Metaphysics*, indeed, he has to prove that there is such a science at all—then to review previous work and current opinions, next to sift these, next to make a map of the subject—to articulate it by means of definitions built up

<sup>1</sup> Mr. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 96. The reference is to *De Caelo*, 298 a 9-15.

with immense acuteness and constant testing, as one pulls at a knot to see if it will hold. It is an austere but deep joy to watch him move over the field of human knowledge, both actual and potential, bringing under cultivation areas that seemed hopeless sand, rock, or morass, meeting and overcoming difficulties that we thought too nebulous to grasp, too complex for manipulation, quickly leaving on one side some great bully of an immemorial problem, subjugating or annihilating lesser bravocs until at last he turns upon the main adversary, now blustering *in vacuo*, and briefly dispatches him, whercon without any sound of trumpets he utters his characteristic *Te Deum*: 'About this, then, let so much be said.'

Each part of the immense Aristotelian *corpus* demands an expert to appraise it duly. His logical works, in their discussion of the methods of reasoning and of sophistic fallacies, reveal his splendid power of exact, clear, and unremitting mental labour; the medieval schoolmen summarized his teaching on the syllogism in the celebrated mnemonic *Barbara, Celarent*, &c., and modern logicians have been able to improve but little upon him. The writings on biology are perhaps the best witness to his prodigious industry; it is likely that this was his favourite science, the predilection being due to his father the physician. Specially notable is his insistence upon teleology—the structure or the functions of a bird or animal are constantly referred to purpose, as opposed to a blind 'survival of the fittest' which Empedocles had alleged. Several times he uses such expressions as 'Nature does nothing beside the matter (*peri ergon*) or at random' (744 b 16), or attributes this purpose to God. Nevertheless, it is not clear to what power the purpose is to be ascribed. Despite these phrases, Aristotle certainly does not recognize in 'nature' (*physis*) any element in the Universe apart from individual men, trees, and the like; and as for his allusions to God, we shall not find in his directly theological doctrine anything which justifies such ascrip-

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tion. The teleology of his biological works must be regarded as a loose end in his system.

The physical writings treat of matter—not ultimate metaphysical matter, but the simplest manifestation of what appeals to our senses, the stuff common to men, stones, trees, and birds—and its conditions, time, space, motion, generation, decay. Here the most important points are his definition of *physis* (often translated 'nature') and his Four Causes. In *Physics*, II. i, he gives apparently two descriptions of 'nature': 'inborn impulse towards change', and 'the shape and form according to definition', the latter phrase meaning that the *physis* of anything is its own complete development—compare his famous saying (*Politics*, 1253 a 2), 'Man is by nature a political animal'; that is, man realizes his full nature only in an organized community. This second definition does not contradict the first, the 'inborn impulse towards change'. Each complements the other; as we shall see, process, motion, change are vital to Aristotle's system, and here he insists on process and realization of process as two sides of the same thing: our ambiguous word 'development', then, will suit his idea of *physis* admirably. The Four Causes are often mentioned, but the best account is in *Physics*, 194 b 16–195 a 3. These causes are the necessary elements in our knowledge of anything: the Material Cause, e. g. the bronze of a statue; the Formal Cause ('the definition of the what-made-it-so'), e. g. the ratio 2 : 1 is the Formal Cause of the octave, the lineaments of Pericles are the Formal Cause of a portrait-bust; the Moving Cause, e. g. the father in relation to his child, or the sculptor to a bust; the Final Cause, e. g. health is the Final Cause of exercise. The particular object or creature, thus existing by imposition of form upon matter by an agent for a preconceived purpose, may in its turn become 'matter' for some more complex development: for instance, the lumps of clay, to which one workman gives the qualities of bricks, are combined by another into a wall; or the

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man produced by his father becomes, with others, the material upon which the legislator impresses the characteristics of a state. In this way the whole Universe can be considered as a system of 'forms' with ultimate matter at the bottom of the scale and God at the summit; but this, as we shall see, would not be the completest way of putting Aristotle's view of the Universe.

The *De Anima*, as it is usually called, deals with the soul. 'Soul' (*psyche*) means for Aristotle organic life—'the first actuality of a physical body endowed with organs' (412 b 5)—first actuality, because one has soul when asleep; the second exists when we are fully alive. There are various phases or parts: the power of nutrition and growth, next of sensation, third of movement, fourth of reason. Each of these implies possession of all the preceding phases (that is the point of Hamlet's words quoted above); plants have only the first, Man alone has all. We may select two points of special interest. When discussing sensation, Aristotle talks of a central power which co-ordinates the reports of the particular senses of sight, hearing, &c. This central power, by way of its Latin name (*communis sensus*), has given us the word—of course with a totally different meaning—'common sense'. Secondly, the discussion of Reason (*Nous*) is deeply impressive. Two sides of it are distinguished, passive reason and active reason. The former apprehends, makes its own, impressions from without. The latter brings this understanding to bear—how? The answer is not certain, but the statement that this part of us, and this alone, survives bodily death, and certain passages implying that it comes to us from without, not from our parents, suggest that this 'active' or 'creative' reason is a temporary and localized godhead conferred upon each of us at birth.

The *Ethics* have long been the most popular work of Aristotle. The aim is to determine what is the greatest good for Man, and this (after a lengthy investigation of mental and moral virtues and of friendship) he finds in the contemplative life. This famous and

that he insists (to the scandal of later enthusiasts) that 'external goods', for example friends, are necessary to full happiness. To his carefully laid-out map of virtues we can make obvious objections; but we should remember that: (i) it is vital for him to oppose blurred thinking; (ii) he does emphasize continually 'the when, the how much, the how' and other such conditions; (iii) he clearly understands that ethics are not an exact science: 'This must be agreed beforehand, that the whole treatment of conduct should be propounded in outline and not rigorously' (1103 b 34). It is this absence of scientific austerity which allows him that noble outburst near the close when discussing the contemplative life (1177 b 31): 'We must not obey those who urge us, because we are human and mortal, to think human and mortal thoughts; in so far as we may, we should practise immortality and omit no effort to live in accordance with the best that is in us.'

Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida* (II. ii) makes Hector speak of

Young men, whom Aristotle thought  
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and has been censured not only for his chronology, but also for a blunder in quotation. The fact is, that although Aristotle does say 'lectures on politics are not suitable for a youth (1095 a 2), he means by 'politics' what we include under ethics, as well as politics; he goes on: 'for he is without experience of the actions which make up life.' In the Greek city-state private and public life were far more closely interwoven than among us. Even in the *Politics* themselves he has something to say of the family. Nevertheless this magnificent body of work deals mainly with the origin, purpose, and types of state, including Aristotle's own conception of an ideal body politic; it is a monument of vast learning, insight, and knowledge of humanity. The features which strike one most are: (i) his conception of the state's growth from the family and the village; (ii) his trenchant criticism of Plato's ideal

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community; (iii) his conception of the end in view—the state ‘arises for the sake of securing life, but continues for the sake of securing good life’ (1252 b 29); (iv) his acceptance of slavery for those who are ‘naturally slaves; (v) his notable remarks on education, the object of which is ‘to enjoy leisure beautifully’ (1337 b 31); (vi) the absence of our modern idea of indefinite progress: like Plato, he believes that the right course is to find the best constitution and then maintain it unchanged.

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle deals first with methods of persuasion, then with style. The earlier part includes study of the audience and so an amusing description of the qualities found in the young, the old, and the middle-aged. Under the last heading he tells us with delightful particularity that ‘the soul is at its best about the age of forty-nine’ (1390 b 11); this may be a serious allusion to ‘the grand climacteric’ or a facetious allusion to Aristotle’s own age. The last book, on style, is full of interesting matter, especially about metaphors; he happens to censure Shakespeare in anticipation when he objects (1406 b 13) to the phraseology of one who called the *Odyssey* ‘a beautiful mirror of human life’.

No secular book of its size can be compared in fame and influence with the *Poetic*.<sup>1</sup> In its present incomplete form it deals mostly with tragic drama, its origin from dithyramb, the history of its development, its elements and purpose. We learn that a tragedy must have a beginning, a middle, and an end—a typical Aristotelian *dictum*, seeming useless until we consider his explanation; we read too his invaluable account of the *peripeteia* or ‘reversal of the action’, which is the central fact of tragic construction; but we do *not* read of the Three Unities—a triad foisted upon Aristotle by later theorists. The most celebrated passage describes the function of tragedy—‘by pity and fear accomplishing the purga-

<sup>1</sup> Often called the *Poetics*, by false analogy with the *Ethics*, &c. But these latter names are in Greek neuter plural, while the *Poetic* and *Rhetoric* are feminine singular, short for ‘the poetic art’, &c.

tion of such emotions' (1449 b 27), where 'purgation' (*catharsis*) is now generally held to mean not 'purification' but 'expulsion'.

We have left till the last his *Metaphysics*, probably the most difficult book in existence, and one of the most important. The science of metaphysics deals with the profoundest conceivable subject: What is Being? What do we mean when we say that a thing 'is'? What is the ultimate reality which causes things to exist? This subject, particularly as a study of causes, forms the topic of this work, but Aristotle never calls it 'metaphysics'—that name means simply 'the things which come after the *Physics*'—but 'first philosophy'. We said above that the Universe, according to Aristotle, might be called a system of existences, each being the 'matter' of that next above it; but that this description is imperfect. His central idea is 'movents'. Each thing sets the 'matter' next below it in motion by giving it form. The Universe, then, exists by a permeating creative stress. At the bottom of the scale lies primary matter, logically postulated but never found free (it cannot exist at all of itself, since existence means having form) whose first development is the four traditional elements, earth, air, fire, water. At the summit is the 'prime unmoved movent', the only existence which imparts motion without in any sense receiving it. Whether this 'prime unmoved movent' is to be called God we must discuss later. Next below this original Being comes the outer sphere of the Universe, what Milton with obscure exactness terms 'that first moved'. We said 'sets in motion by giving form'; both these words need explanation. By 'motion' Aristotle means not only local, but every kind of, change: thus the acorn brings forth an oak which grows and decays. By 'form' he means the total of qualities in virtue of which we apply the word 'trout' to one piece of matter, 'partridge' to another. It is the *infima species* 'trout', &c., which is the proper object of human knowledge, since the 'really existent' is the form, but always (for human study) the form as impressed upon matter.

Returning now to the conception of the Universe as a nexus of creative movents we come to a distinction possessing high importance, that between potentiality (*dynamis*) and actuality (*energeia*). A child is potentially an adult, a pile of timber potentially a boat or bridge. By this means we can solve the puzzle which Socrates set, in alleging that no one sins knowingly: we see now that a man may know the right but his knowledge may be in abeyance. And in general, whereas we said that each thing is 'matter' to that next above it, so we may now assert it to be potentially that higher thing, and the Universe to be a process of more and more intense realization. Primary matter 'is' (but the verb is plainly a solecism) potentiality only. On the other hand, God energizes continuously. For in that famous Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics* he identifies the prime unmoved movent with God. There are difficulties here, but at least he evidently attributes consciousness to the Movent. That God energizes continuously is the logical outcome of his system: in the highest Being there can reside no mere potentiality, nothing unrealized (otherwise we must postulate something further to give actuality to that undeveloped element). Thus God is happy, since he is ever, throughout his being, completely himself. We human beings experience now and again a flash of illumination in which intellect, emotion, and bodily vigour blend into one rapture: those instants give some hint of God's continuous state. What is the relation between him and the material Universe? He is not its creator: its time-and-space conditions are without beginning; nor are we to suppose that he rules or guides it by his purpose. We are told only that he is the source of its motion and that the motion is analogous to love (1072 b 3).

Some mention should be made of the relations between this system and the Platonic. Emerson wrote: 'A wise man will see that Aristotle platonizes.' Aristotle himself would hardly concur; at any rate he disagrees with, is even annoyed by, the Theory of Ideas, and offers numerous arguments, of very different value, in

refutation. It should be first observed that one can, indeed, easily draw up a scheme true for both philosophers : in the *Philebus* Plato's unlimited, limit, cause of mingling (i. e. the agent imposing limit upon the unlimited), and the mixture, correspond well to the Aristotelian Four Causes. Nevertheless, these men look at the field of existence from opposite sides. There are two vital differences between them. First, though the Aristotelian Form does correspond to the Platonic Idea (so much so that their views of science are closely alike), the Form is always immanent in that to which it gives existence, while the Idea (in Plato's later teaching) exists utterly apart from the particulars ; and Plato is primarily interested in this transcendental Idea, Aristotle in the natural kind made by the immanent Form. Secondly, the main feature in Aristotle's expressed objections to Plato is that he has not really dealt with ' motion '. The Ideas, even if they account for particulars, do not account for this vital quality in them, that they are constantly in ' motion ' ; how, indeed, could the Ideas account for generation, being themselves ever immobile ? That which in Aristotle's system answers to the imitation of Ideas by particulars is the affiliation of particular to particular—' man begets man ' (*Physics*, 194 b 13). Thus, although both systems embrace the whole Universe, Plato's heart is fixed upon what transcends our world, Aristotle's upon the men, birds, fish, trees, and waters subject to his senses. Raphael, in his fresco styled the School of Athens, has placed in the midst of the assembled philosophers these two figures side by side, Plato holding the *Timaeus* and pointing a single finger upwards to the world beyond sense, Aristotle with the *Ethics* in his left hand, his right pointing with all fingers horizontally to the world around.

Aristotle lived and worked at the end of an age, the strictly ' classical ' Greek period. The writings which bear his name form a vast report upon Greek civilization, the Greek spirit, Greek learning, so far as these things may be systematically presented at



all. The more we study him the better do we understand the desire of Marlowe's Faustus to 'live and die in Aristotle's works'. This scientist without a microscope was the most many-sided scientific genius of all time. And, immense as are his achievements in that field, he may also claim kinship with the potent seers who passed beyond the boundaries of the sensible world. His doctrine that love is the force impelling all things to higher self-development is in tune with Plato's *Symposium*, is repeated in the culminating song of Goethe's *chorus mysticus* that 'the eternal feminine leads us upward and on', and has inspired the words wherewith Dante closes his *Divina Commedia*—'the love that moves the sun and the other stars'.

## II

*Herodotus*

HERODOTUS was born at Halicarnassus, a city of Ionian Greece, in (or not much earlier than) 480 B. C., of a distinguished family, to which the epic poet Panyasis also belonged. After taking part in the tumultuous politics of his native town, Herodotus travelled very widely. It seems that he wrote at least parts of his history in early middle age. Tradition tells that after a public reading at Athens he received by decree a reward of ten talents, and that Thucydides as a boy was deeply impressed by his work. In any case he must have spent a long time in that city; Sophocles plainly had a high regard for him—he wrote an ode for Herodotus and quotes him several times. He knew the Acropolis and its buildings well (v. 77). When Thurii was founded (444 B. C.) on

the ruins of Sybaris in South Italy, Herodotus became a citizen of that town. He died about 426 B. C.

His work has come down to us divided into nine books, each named after one of the Muses; but this division was not made by Herodotus himself. His subject is the Persian Wars—the invasions of Greece by Darius in 490 and by Xerxes in 480–479; it ends with the capture of Sestos. But there is much matter which would not have been included by a modern historian. Not only are there frequent anecdotes, brilliantly and delightfully told but not germane to ‘history’: there are also vast digressions on the geography, customs, and history of countries or peoples only incidentally concerned with the invasions of Greece; for example, the whole of the Second Book is filled by the celebrated account of Egypt. The scope of his work is indicated by his opening words:

‘Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his researches, with the intent that things which have happened may not perish from among men by lapse of time, and that great and marvellous deeds, some displayed by Greeks, others by barbarians, may not lack renown; and, in particular, for what cause they fought with one another.’

But before we consider his conception of ‘research’ (*historiē*) or ‘history’, it will be useful to note examples of it.

In i. 29–34 he tells the splendid but unhistorical story of the meeting between Croesus, king of Lydia, and the Athenian Solon. Croesus, intoxicated with power and wealth, showed Solon all his treasures and asked whom he thought the happiest of mankind. Solon briefly answered: ‘O King, Tellus the Athenian.’ Invited to explain, he said that Tellus lived in a flourishing city, had a fine family, and died gloriously for his country. The patient monarch then inquired who held the second place, and was told of Cleobis and Bito, Argive youths who, after a charming display of dutifulness towards their mother, were blessed by Heaven with

death in their sleep. At this Croesus, losing his temper, asked why his own happiness was spurned in comparison with that of lowly men, and was read the memorable lesson that we must 'look to the end' and call no man happy until he is dead. Unimpressed at the moment, he sent Solon away, 'thinking him a complete fool', but later, when defeated and at point to be slain by Cyrus, he remembered the conversation, and as he stood upon the pyre cried out thrice the name 'Solon', with impressive results (i. 86, 87).

Discussing the sources of the Nile, Herodotus tells a story about the Nasamones, an African tribe (ii. 32).

'Among them were certain wild youths of princely rank, who on reaching manhood planned many extraordinary pranks, and in particular appointed by lot five of their number to explore the African Desert in hopes of seeing more than the most widely travelled men. Well, these youths were sent out by their comrades fully supplied with water and food. First they travelled through settled country; when they had passed this, they came to the region of wild beasts; next they traversed the desert, making towards the West Wind. After marching through a vast country of sand for many days, they saw at last trees growing on a plain; coming to the spot, they took of the fruit which was upon the trees. While so engaged, they were interrupted by little men, shorter than men of moderate stature, who took and led them away. The Nasamones understood no word of their speech, nor did their captors understand that of the Nasamones. So they led them through immense marshes, and later arrived at a city, where all the people were black in colour and resembled their captors in size. Beside the city flowed a great river; and it flowed from the West to the rising sun. In it were to be seen crocodiles.'

Later in the same book (ii. 73) is a description of

'another sacred bird, called Phoenix. I did not see it, except in a picture: indeed, it rarely visits Egypt—once every five hundred years, when its father dies. . . . Starting from Arabia, it conveys

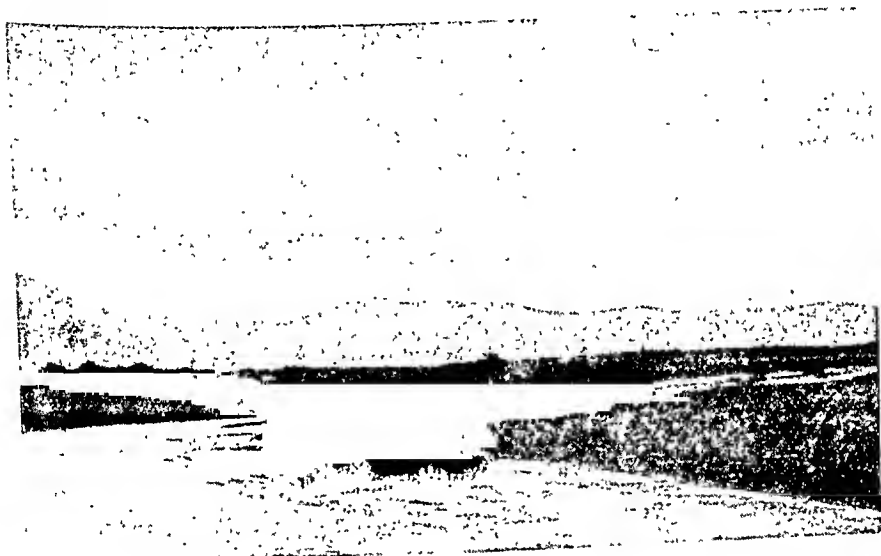
to the Temple of the Sun its father plastered up in myrrh, and buries him in the Sun's Temple. This is the way it conveys him. First, it moulds an egg of myrrh as big as it can carry; then it makes a trial flight; this done, it hollows out the egg and puts its father inside, plastering up with fresh myrrh the opening in the egg through which it inserted its father. When its father is bestowed, the weight is unchanged. Having stopped the hole, it takes him away towards Egypt to the Sun's temple. This, then, (they say) is what this bird does.'

Here is the fighting at Marathon (vi. 111-14) :

'When the Athenians were being drawn up at Marathon, this happened: their line was equal in length to the line of the Medes, but their centre was only a few files deep, and the line was weakest there; but each wing was strong in numbers. When their dispositions were made, and the sacrifices were favourable, thereupon the Athenians got the word to move and charged the barbarians at the run. Now the space between the hosts was not less than eight furlongs. The Persians, seeing them advancing at a run, made ready to receive them: they thought the Athenians mad, and ruinously mad, seeing them so few and nevertheless hastening at a run when they had no cavalry or arrows. Such, then, was the notion of the barbarians. But the Athenians, falling in a mass upon the barbarians, fought notably. For, first of all Greeks known to us, they ran against foemen, and were the first to face the sight of the Median dress and the men that wore it; before that day, the very name "Mede" had been a sound of terror to the Greeks. While they were fighting at Marathon much time passed. The centre of the line was defeated by the barbarians, where the Persians themselves and the Sacae were posted; at this place, then, the barbarians won, and breaking the line pursued them inland. But on each wing the Athenians and Plataeans won, and leaving the routed force of the barbarians to flee and drawing together both wings they fought with those who had broken their centre. The Athenians won, and pursued the fleeing Persians with slaughter, until reaching the sea they called for fire and laid hold of the ships. In this tussle the polemarch Callimachus was slain, having shown himself a brave man; of the generals Stesilaus son of Thrasylaus died; also, Cynaegirus son of

Euphron had his hand chopped off with an axe and fell there, grasping a ship's stern-timbers.'

It is plain that Herodotus, though, in Cicero's phrase, 'the father of history', is both less and more than an historian like Tacitus or Gibbon. He is the direct descendant of Homer, appealing in the same way to an audience which is the same in



THE PLAIN OF MARATHON

temper as Homer's audience though its knowledge and interests have widened. Herodotus, like the early poets, tells of battle and adventure, with the epic insistence upon the personal, the spectacular. Again, much of his work is not history at all, but geography, moralizing, gossip, ethnology—anything which will interest an audience; for his work is meant not to be read and studied, but to be heard and enjoyed. All topics suit his pen—the way to catch a crocodile, the nations of the Orient defiling endlessly over the bridge of boats, Alcmaeon staggering out of Croesus' treasury (boots and mouth crammed with gold-dust), the Barcine smith's

device to detect hostile mines, or the supreme grapple of two navies at Salamis. The *Treatise on the Sublime* calls him 'most Homeric', and that quality is perhaps best shown by his power to deal with any topic appropriately. He can be as dignified as his subject demands—for instance, when the Persian noble at dinner foretells the disaster at Plataea (ix. 16); or as light and fluent—for example, in the sensational story (ii. 121) about the Egyptian master-thief.

On the other side, he is a contemporary of Anaxagoras and has a conscience about the collection and presentation of fact. It by no means follows that, because he is a facile, garrulous Ionian, he is no scientific historian. That is a mistake which we are inclined to commit and which Thucydides committed. The truth is, Herodotus understands his business, in theory, quite as well as Thucydides himself. His conception of method is plain. In ii. 99 he writes: 'Up to this point my observation, judgement, and research have been speaking. I am now going to utter Egyptian accounts based on hearsay; mingled with them will be something of my own observation.' In vii. 152: 'It is my duty to repeat what is said, but to believe unreservedly is not; this remark applies to all my work.' He was clearly at great pains to collect the most trustworthy information: once he took ship for Tyre to verify a single date (ii. 44). And he employs judgement upon his materials, testing attractive stories by common sense. When Xerxes was fleeing from Eion to Asia, so great a storm arose that it was necessary to lighten the ship; whereupon the nobles of his suite threw themselves into the sea. Herodotus does not believe this, for Xerxes would surely have saved the Persians and jettisoned the Phoenician crew (viii. 118, 119). For the talking doves of Dodona he offers a thoroughly 'modern' explanation (ii. 57).

Nevertheless, there are two reasons why his work strikes us as less authoritative, less weighty, than the history of Thucydides.

The first is that in practice Herodotus is much inferior in mental power, analytical keenness, and equipment. He fails more often to carry out his own principles ; many times he accepts miraculous accounts which investigation would have disproved. His equipment is inferior simply because his subject-matter is so much vaster than the Athenian's. Herodotus gives elaborate accounts of nations whose language he does not understand, whose archives and inscriptions he cannot read : he is at the mercy of every cicerone. The other reason is that while Thucydides brings everything to the bar of pure reason, Herodotus will often rest his explanations upon his own religious belief. Without discussing theology in general, or the truth of Herodotus' creed in particular, we may yet observe that in modern times an historian gains greater credit for assigning economic or political causes than for adducing the will of Heaven. Thucydides (ii. 84) will account for a naval success by telling us that Phormio understood local weather conditions. Herodotus writes (viii. 13) : 'It was all being done by the god, so that the Persian fleet might be brought down to the number of the Greek.'

This religious disposition helps to explain his frequent moralizing. To the story of Croesus and Solon may be added the long discussion (iii. 80-2) on the merits of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy, assigned by Herodotus to three Persians, and also an impressive story of Darius (iii. 38). The king asked certain Greeks (who burned their dead) for what sum they would eat the bodies of their dead fathers ; they replied that nothing would induce them. Next he inquired of some Indians (who ate their dead) for what price they would consent to burn their deceased fathers ; they cried out in horror at his impiety. 'I think Pindar wrote correctly when he said that Custom is king of all.'

Herodotus is not only the first great prose-author of Greece : he is the last of the pre-Attic writers. Never again in antiquity was it possible for epic largeness and scientific research, for

garrulity and dignity, for unquestioning piety and hardheaded sense, for interest in 'barbarians' and love of Greece, to be all combined in one great writer. The man whom About called 'le bonhomme Hérodote' gave us the immortal story of Thermopylae; he has kinship with Mandevile and Macaulay, with Froissart and Hans Andersen. He stands at the close of an age and must have seemed to Aristotle more alien than to us.

## 12

*Thucydides*

THIS writer, who composed in what are now eight<sup>1</sup> books a history of the 'Peloponnesian War' (431-404 B.C.), was born at Athens between 470 and 455 B.C. Through his father Olorus he was connected with Miltiades, the Marathonian hero, and inherited great wealth derived from the gold-mines of Scapté Hulé in Thrace. The rhetorician Antiphon and the philosopher Anaxagoras were probably among his teachers. We hear that as a boy he was present at a public reading given by Herodotus of his history, which so impressed the young Thucydides that he burst into tears, whereupon Herodotus congratulated Olorus upon his son's bent for learning. In 431 the great war broke out and Thucydides, realizing its importance, began at once a record of it. He suffered from the plague of 430, which slew so many thousands of Athenians, but survived to write a celebrated account of it in his Second Book. In 424 he commanded a squadron

<sup>1</sup> This division of the work was not made by Thucydides himself. Several arrangements were known in antiquity: some scholars made eight, some nine, some thirteen books.



as 'general' (*strategos*) in the Northern Aegean. At this time the great Spartan, Brasidas, was performing notable exploits against Athens in the sea-board region of Thrace. His crowning feat was the capture of Amphipolis. Thucydides arrived too late to hold the town against him, and though he defended the neighbouring port of Eïon with vigour and success, the Athenians punished him for the loss of Amphipolis by banishment which lasted twenty years (iv. 103-7, v. 26). This period he spent upon his history, mostly at his property in Scapté Hulé; but it is clear that he travelled for his information, and visited Sicily among other places. Returning to Athens after the end of the war, he was no doubt occupied with his history till he died, for the work was left unfinished: it stops at events of 411 B.C., and the books which we possess are not fully revised. Ancient tradition says that he died by violence; the date is unknown, but he cannot have lived till 395 B.C., in which year occurred an eruption of Etna about which he knew nothing (iii. 116).

Thucydides is the earliest great Athenian prose-writer, his chief models being the Sicilian Gorgias and the Athenian Antiphon. But he owes far less to any model than to native genius. His manner is compressed and powerful, but often involved and difficult. These latter characteristics arise from two causes. Firstly, he insists on thinking out and expressing the exact and smallest details of an event, the finest tendrils of psychological causation. Secondly, since he wrote when there was practically no tradition of Attic prose, and when the study of Greek grammar was only beginning, he is capable, and probably unaware, of great harshness and incorrectness of syntax.

As an historical study the work is of vast importance: the author had at his command piercing sagacity, a truly philosophic temper, deep interest in his subject, clear understanding of what was relevant to it, power of judging evidence, leisure and means to travel, a great store of human and documentary evidence.

But not all portions of his work are written on the same scale. It seems that, beginning at the outbreak of war, he made a continuous rough draft of all we possess. From time to time certain episodes were elaborated into magnificently picturesque and poignant or exciting narratives, while other portions remained carefully written indeed, but in a more commonplace manner; the Eighth Book, for instance, received little of this final enrichment, so that some ancient critics regarded it as spurious, the work of Xenophon, Theopompus, or Thucydides' own daughter, though the latter view is scouted by Marcellinus—'to imitate such nobility and art was beyond the nature of woman.' The famous speeches (there are none at all in the Eighth Book) may well have formed a separate stage in this elaboration. Among the specially excellent passages above mentioned, we may point to his account of the Plague (ii. 47-54), the Escape from Plataea (iii. 20-4), the affair of Pylos and Sphacteria (iv. 3-41), and, from his account of the Sicilian Expedition, the immortal descriptions of the Last Sea-Fight (vii. 70, 71) and the Retreat from Syracuse (vii. 75-85).

The study of his aim and method cannot open better than by examination of his own words:

'Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war in which the Peloponnesians and the Athenians fought against one another. He began to write when they first took up arms, believing that it would be great and memorable above any previous war. For he argued that both parties were then at the full height of their military power, and he saw the rest of the Greeks either siding, or intending to side, with one or the other' (i. 1). 'As to the speeches which were made either before or during the war, it was hard for me, and for others who reported them to me, to recollect the exact words. I have therefore attributed to each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion, as I thought him likely to express them, keeping as close as I could to the general purport of what was actually said. The events of the war I have not ventured to relate on any chance inform-

nor according to notions of my own ; I have described only what I myself witnessed or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular inquiry. The research was laborious, because eyewitnesses of the same events gave accounts which varied according to their partiality or memory. It may be that the absence of romantic charm will make my narrative poor hearing ; but I shall be content if it is judged useful by those seeking exact knowledge of a past which (till human nature changes) is sure to repeat itself exactly or approximately. My history is an everlasting possession, not a prize-composition which is heard and forgotten' (i. 22). 'I lived through the whole of it, being of mature years for observation and applying my powers to the acquisition of exact knowledge. Moreover, it was my lot to be exiled from my country for twenty years after I held the command at Amphipolis, and associating with both sides, with the Peloponnesians quite as much as with the Athenians, because of my exile, I was a notably unharassed spectator' (v. 26).<sup>1</sup>

From these statements, and from the practice which they describe, we may take four points in an order of increasing importance. First, Thucydides arranges his story chronologically, 'according to summers and winters', and for this he has often been censured, because an important narrative is sometimes suspended while we read of slighter events elsewhere. But his main object is to give historical events in historical order—he is a scientist as well as an artist. Secondly, he insists on the laborious acquisition, and the impartial sifting, of evidence. This method, obvious to us, was less obvious then. Thucydides plainly regards Herodotus as failing badly here—it is no doubt at Herodotus that he aims his famous sneer about 'prize-compositions'—and though he is in this largely mistaken, he is right in proclaiming himself at variance with those who purveyed delightful but legendary narratives. A natural result of his patient impartiality was that some accused him of spite against his own country. Thirdly, the speeches are much more important to his intention

<sup>1</sup> Based on Jowett's translation (Oxford, 1884).

than the corresponding passages of Livy, for example. Couched for the most part in language abstract, terse, and difficult, they express, besides the general purport of what Alcibiades or Cleon really said, the historian's own views on political science, morals, and psychology. Just as his fellow-countrymen the tragedians tend to reject in their 'episodes' the incidental chance of profound moralizing and emotional expression, reserving such matter for the definitely lyrical performances of the Chorus, so Thucydides refrains from the casual comment, the incidental moralizing, which events evoke from the modern historian, and canalizes such expression in the elaborate speeches which a crisis occasions.

Fourthly, one notes his dry reference to the absence of legendary or romantic charm. He will owe nothing to the supernatural persons and events of Greek legend. Of all Athenian writers, Thucydides stands perhaps closest to the spirit which Pericles and his friend Anaxagoras, the great rationalist from Clazomenae, impressed upon Athenian art and thought. Thucydides sets out to explain human events in terms of humanity. Never does he consent to account for anything, however vast or mysterious, by 'the will of the gods': he points to over-population, or jealousy, or some other cause familiar in the daily life of his readers. This is emphatically not because he is an atheist: he is an agnostic—since trustworthy experience and research tell him nothing about the gods, he is silent as to their activities. Nevertheless, he is aware that his science cannot account for everything. Though he blames Nicias for superstition in wrecking a vital plan through the dread inspired by an eclipse (vii. 50), he incessantly notes the power of Chance to thwart the best sagacity of Man. His account of the Plague is in this regard, as in others, deeply interesting. How was it caused? Why did it come upon Athens? For once Thucydides has no scientific theory, and he leaves the door open for a supernatural cause: writing of the arrival of the plague,

he employs a notable and rare word, *encataskepsai* ('to swoop down upon') which is used by Aeschylus (*Persae*, 514) for the miseries which *God* has hurled down upon the Persians. About oracles he is plainly sceptical. Eclipses, which terrified the vulgar, he regards as natural phenomena. 'There was an eclipse of the sun at the time of the new moon, apparently the only time at which it is possible' (ii. 28).

Cautious, reserved as he is, Thucydides nevertheless understands and feels human emotion; but instead of telling his readers what to feel, he is generally content to give them the opportunity of feeling. No denunciation of cynical tyranny holds and communicates such searing hatred as his celebrated, ostensibly quite objective, Melian Dialogue (v. 85-113). The little island of Melos—



THUCYDIDES (Holkham head)

Thucydides faces the facts of human depravity by portraying men—his own countrymen—who avow their own depravity with a candour like his own. To his impartial eye it matters little whether they are his countrymen or not; the murderous horrors of party strife in Corcyra form the occasion for his famous disquisition upon the progressive degradation caused by the war (iii. 70–83).

But whatever he thought of individual Athenians, even of national acts, Athens was to him the splendid fountain and symbol of spiritual light. For the Periclean Athenian, indeed, the City took the place of those equivocal deities whose very existence he must doubt. This is the root-idea of that glorious Funeral Speech which the historian reports as an utterance of Pericles (ii. 35–46); for example:

‘I would have you day by day fix your eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until you become her lovers; and when you are impressed by her glory, reflect that this has been acquired by men of daring who know their duty, who in action were sustained by their honour, and who, if ever they failed in an enterprise, would not allow their virtues to be lost to their country, but gave their lives as the fairest offering which they could present at her feast. . . . The whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men: not only are they commemorated by inscribed tablets in their own country, but in foreign lands also there dwells within each heart an unwritten memorial, if not of their achievements, yet of their spirit.’<sup>1</sup>

The whole oration should be pondered by any one who wishes to understand the greatness and the weakness of Athens. It is perhaps the central passage of Attic literature, showing forth the Athenian spirit more incisively than anything written even by Sophocles or by Plato. The greatness, the inspiration, which the Speech contains are plain to behold. Its omissions are no less notable. Though Pericles is bent on consoling the relatives of the fallen, and on urging others to the same valour, there is here

<sup>1</sup> Based on Jowett's translation (Oxford, 1884).

no word of religious faith, no hint of a life beyond death. Not that these conceptions were unknown in Athens; but the man who has himself no such belief refuses, even at an hour like this, to make a cheap asset of popular hopes. So it is that he can content himself with the most terrible, surely, of all consolations ever set before the bereaved: 'Some of you are of an age at which they may hope to have other children, and they ought to bear their sorrow better; not only will the children, who may hereafter be born make them forget their own lost ones, but the City will be doubly a gainer. She will not be left desolate, and she will be safer.' And at the end comes his one address to the women among his vast audience. 'If I am to speak also of womanly virtues to those who will henceforth be widows, I will convey the whole in a short admonition: to a woman it is a great glory not to sink below the weakness of her sex, and to be talked about among men as little as possible for good or for censure.'

Though Thucydides allows no space in his world for Zeus, Athena, and the other deities, he realizes that our life is guided by powers whose seat is nearer than Olympus. The facts of a man's soul are half-personified in his pages: those gnarled and trenchant political speeches are haunted by Hope, Persuasion, Greed, Loyalty, Justice, Fear—the true Athenian Pantheon. This instinct to construct a theology out of ethics comes to him in part from Aeschylus, who has almost as much to say of Pride and Original Sin as of Zeus and Phoebus Apollo. Mention of Aeschylus brings us to our last point. 'Thucydides' conception of history is not like that of Herodotus, epic, but dramatic. There is no mistaking the art which has seized upon the affair of Melos (in itself a small incident), has made it into a great episode by means of the appalling Dialogue, and placed the whole picture immediately before that Sicilian Expedition which was the supreme effort of Athens and which wrought her frightful overthrow. The story of the Expedition, too, is composed like a vast

tragedy, with Athens herself as protagonist. The *peripeteia* or climax is the appearance of the Spartan Gylippus to succour the sore-bested Syracusans ; he throws himself into the city just in time : the immense Athenian siege-works were all but completed—‘ so narrow was the escape of Syracuse.’ In the first part of the story we are dazzled by the far-reaching might and ambition of Athens ; in the later part we watch her ever-sinking fortunes. The scene at the Piraeus, where the fleet puts out to sea amid the splendour of wealth, music, and boundless hopes, is answered by the agony of the retreat, where the hunted invaders, utterly beaten on land, their huge fleets sunk or captured, the glory of their City nothing but a torturing memory, stumble forward in hopeless flight and are shot down in the river Assinarus as they trample on one another in their thirst-maddened struggle to gulp the miry blood-stained waters.



Syracusan coin celebrating Victory. Captured  
Athenian armour at the foot



*Xenophon*

XENOPHON was an Athenian born about 425 B.C. He was taught by Prodicus, then by Socrates, whose personality and ethical views made a lasting impression. In 401 Xenophon joined the expedition which Cyrus was preparing against his brother Artaxerxes, king of Persia. After the battle of Cunaxa the Greek contingent found themselves surrounded by enemies in the heart of the Persian Empire, and their generals murdered. Xenophon helped to lead them through hostile savages, mountains, and snow-drifts to the Black Sea and so at length to safety. Later he accompanied the great Spartan, Agesilaus, on his Asiatic campaigns, returned with him, and fought in the Spartan army at Coronea (394) against Thebes and Athens. Being exiled from Athens, he received from the Spartans an estate at Scillus in Elis, where he lived for some twenty years engaged in field-sports and literary composition. He died about 350 B.C.

His works are not only interesting as literature and full of information; they reveal also a charming and versatile character. His adventurous many-sided life had three great interests: philosophy, war, and manly sports; it was dominated by two great personalities—Socrates and Agesilaus.

The philosophic writings give us a picture of Socrates which is a necessary complement to the more imaginative work of Plato. It has been said that the latter corresponds to the Fourth Gospel, the former to St. Mark's. And there is a story which resembles the calling of certain Apostles. One day Socrates met him in the street and inquired where one could buy this and that.

Xenophon told him. 'And where must one go to become a good man?' The youth could not answer. 'Follow me,' said Socrates, 'and I will show you.' The lessons which Xenophon learned were practical, the love of virtue, fairness of mind, sagacity. His *Apology* explains why Socrates did not fear death. The *Memorabilia* are a record of the Master's conversations, designed to show the Athenians how innocent Socrates was of the charges which led to his execution. Xenophon shows here some of Boswell's merits: he reports the Master's conversations with a minimum of comment and so conveys to us a personality splendidly vigorous and in love with virtue and common sense. But, had we no other account, Socrates would be almost forgotten to-day. The *Symposium* depicts Socrates at a drinking-party and ends with a charming naive account of a little play between Dionysus and Ariadne. In the *Oeconomicus* we read an account of household management given by one Ischomachus: 'What a beautiful sight when shoes are arranged according to their kinds, and clothes properly sorted!' (viii. 19). The most interesting passage is Ischomachus's training of his girl-wife (vii-x).

A tract on *Revenues* recommends the development of the Athenian mines. *Hiero* is a dialogue between that great Syracusan ruler and the poet Simonides on the business of a 'tyrant'. The *Polity of Sparta* describes the Lacedaemonian organization admiringly but (if the passage is genuine) laments present-day degeneracy. In the famous *Education of Cyrus* is an ideal picture of Cyrus the Great and the development of an imaginary state. The *Constitution of Athens* is an important little treatise wrongly ascribed to Xenophon; it was written about 420, apparently by an oligarchic Athenian, and describes the democracy of Athens with hostility and insight. *Hunting*, *Horsemanship*, and the *Commander of Cavalry* are three practical handbooks.

Xenophon's historical works are the most important. *Agésilas* is a biography of the great soldier who narrowly missed anticipating

the conquests of Alexander. The *Hellenica* are a continuation of Thucydides, valuable for what they tell, but untrustworthy in so far as they omit or minimize: Xenophon's devotion to Sparta has led him to whittle down, or fail to see, the importance of Epaminondas and the foundation of Megalopolis. The first two books are the best, and his description of the coming of the news from Aegospotami is famous. 'At Athens the tidings were announced when the *Paralus* arrived at nightfall, and the wailing passed up the Long Walls to the City as one passed the news to another. That night no one slept. They mourned not only the dead but themselves far more, expecting to suffer the doom they had inflicted upon Melos, the Spartan colony, and Histiaea, Scione, Torone, Aegina, and many other Greek towns' (II. ii. 3). The *Anabasis*, one of the best-known and best-loved books in Greek, describes first the expedition proper, and then (in six of the seven books) the retreat of the ten thousand Greek mercenaries after Cunaxa through the Persian Empire to the Greek cities on the Black Sea and so to Thrace. It is a story filled with peril, courage, and resourcefulness, relieved by many personal notes and picturesque details—the miseries of frostbite and snow-blindness (IV. v. 12–16), the Mossynoeci whose children thrive so well on chestnuts and pickled dolphin that they were 'nearly as wide as tall', the tempting expanse being entirely tattooed (V. iv), and a wealth of quaint or courageous feats. The most celebrated passage describes the climax upon the summit of Mount Theches.

'A great clamour arose. Xenophon and the rearguard imagined that new enemies were attacking in front . . . but as the shouting grew louder and nearer, and each party as it came to the top began to run towards those who took up the shouting, and the volume of clamour kept growing as more arrived, it struck Xenophon that something peculiar was afoot. Mounting his horse he took Lycius and the cavalry and galloped forward. In a few moments they heard the soldiers shouting "The Sea! the Sea!" and

passing the word along. At this every man began to run, even the rearguard; the mules and horse were put to the trot. When all had reached the summit, in that moment they embraced one another, their generals and their captain, weeping' (IV. vii. 21-5).

Xenophon is no genius, but it is precisely because of this that he provides the finest example of what the Greek world could provide as a truly liberal education.

## 14

*Demosthenes*

DEMOSTHENES was born at Athens in 384 B.C. His father, a rich manufacturer, died when Demosthenes was seven years old. The boy's guardians embezzled much of the estate, and at the age of twenty-one he went to law with them, succeeding after much litigation but regaining little of his property. He began to address the National Assembly, but failed at first owing to nervousness and defects of utterance. Quaint stories are told of the methods by which he overcame these faults. In order to win confidence for facing the turbulent assembly, he would stand on the beach during a storm, declaiming a line of the *Odyssey* full of craggy consonants. To keep himself close to his studies he would shave in such a ridiculous fashion that he dared not leave his room. The indistinctness of his speech he cured by declaiming with pebbles in his mouth. Devices less surprising to us are his habit of drinking water only, in order to keep awake, and of working all night; this latter habit provoked the famous gibe, 'Your speeches smell of the lamp.' It is said that he copied out Thucydides

eight times; certainly he was impregnated with the historian's subject-matter.

He succeeded first as a *logographos*, writing speeches for others to use in the courts. While so engaged he began important work in his own person, delivering in 355 or 354 the celebrated oration against Leptines. In 351 began his famous struggle against the aggression of the Macedonian king, Philip, a struggle ended only by the complete overthrow of Athens at Chaeronea in 338. To this period belong his most admired speeches, the *Philippics*, the *Olynthiacs*, the *False Embassy*, and (in a sense) the *De Corona* or 'Speech on the Crown', universally regarded as the greatest oration of all time. In 336 Philip was assassinated, and Athens and Thebes rose to secure their independence. But Philip's son, Alexander, began his earth-shaking career by crushing the revolt with promptness and severity.



THE VATICAN DEMOSTHENES

The hands are a modern restoration and should be clasped

and the historic facts of his career make it fairly certain that the aims which he urged upon Athens were really dear to him. Further, it is doubtful whether it was even possible to speak as he did without sincerity: a hypocrite would have spoken as nobly, perhaps, but not with the same kind of nobility. There are some symptoms of honesty which cannot be manufactured. One might as well say that Shakespeare did not love music, or Goethe knowledge, as that Demosthenes did not love nobility in politics.

The immense will-power which marked his life has definitely inspired his orations. Everlastingly he urges the Athenians to exert their will: 'if only you will consent to do your duty.' These great harangues are no more remarkable for abuse and exposure of Philip than for instruction of Athens in public morals and sound politics: his *Philippics* are not 'philippics'. More than once, detesting the Macedonian as he does, he yet delivers reluctant but magnificent eulogy of his one great merit—will-power. 'Philip, our adversary, in quest of sovereignty and dominion had had his eye knocked out, his collar-bone broken, his hand and leg injured, and was prepared to sacrifice whatever part of his body Fortune chose to take, if only with the rest of his person he might live in honour and glory' (*De Corona*, 247). It is this combination of noble admonition with professional art and practical statesmanship which gives his works their permanent value.

'It is impossible, men of Athens, impossible to found lasting power on injustice, perjury, and lies. Such enterprises endure for their first brief hour, aye, and put forth gorgeous blossoms of hope, belike, but Time detects the cheat; their petals shrivel and fall. Just as a house, a ship, or any such matter must have its greatest strength in the foundations, so (it seems to me) must the beginnings and principles of conduct be sincere and just' (*Olynthiac* ii. 21).

One leading excellence of Demosthenes cannot be shown in brief extracts—his variety of manner. Long and brilliantly detailed

sentences are followed by curt blasting phrases or questions of contempt, anger, denunciation; scraps of supposed conversation succeed eloquent and solemn appeals; his emotion rises till the page is starred with metaphors. Even humour is seen in some of the private orations, the subject of which allows him to give brilliant pictures of everyday Athenian life—the ostentation of Meidias' huge house at Eleusis, and the young Mohawks whose brutal pranks made Conon's life a burden. It must suffice to give some conception of his most famous passage, describing the panic which filled Athens when news came that Philip was threatening the city itself (*De Corona*, 169-73).

' Evening fell, and there came one with tidings for the Presiding Committee that Elateia was in Philip's hands. They were in the midst of dinner, and instantly rising from the table some of them removed the occupants of the booths in the market-place and set fire to the wicker-work, while others sent for the military staff and summoned the trumpeter; tumult filled the city. Next day at sunrise the Committee summoned the Council to their chamber, you made your way to the Assembly, and before the Council could do their business and prepare the agenda all the people were ready seated. Thereupon, after the Council had entered and the Committee had announced the news brought to them and introduced the messenger and he had spoken, the crier asked "Who wishes to speak?" And there stepped forward—no one. Again and again that question was asked, nevertheless no man rose, though all the generals were present and all the statesmen, though our country called through the public voice for the man who should speak and save her. . . . Yet had it behoved those who desired her safety to step forward, all of you and every man of Athens would have risen and walked to the platform, for you all, I know, desired her safety; had it behoved the richest, the Three Hundred would have risen; had it behoved those endowed with both patriotism and wealth, those would have come forward who had performed costly special services, for they did this through patriotism and riches. But that hour of crisis called apparently for a man not only patriotic and wealthy, but one who had followed the march of affairs from the outset, who had accurately

gauged the purpose and the desire guiding Philip's actions ; for no man, however patriotic, however wealthy, who did not know these and had not watched them from afar with careful scrutiny, could know what should be done or give you counsel. There appeared on that day such a man. It was I.'

Demosthenes has been compelled by the attack of Aeschines to offer his splendid self-justification ; and no passage ever written shows better the real secret of political greatness—to meet a testing situation where routine fails.

## 15

*Theocritus*

THEOCRITUS was born about 310 B. C. in Sicily and died later than 270 ; he lived and worked in Sicily, in the island of Cos, and in Alexandria. Nearly all his poems are in hexameter verse ; they are mostly named *eidyllia* (our 'idylls'), which probably means 'little pictures'. The favourite subject is the life of rustics—their work, love-troubles, pleasures, and quarrels. Though Theocritus has much realism, and little of that artificial daintiness which marks the pastoral verse of our 'Augustan' era and the absurd 'hamlet' at Versailles, he nevertheless heightens and sophisticates the charm of rural life.

*Harvest Home*, the Seventh Idyll, tells how the poet and some friends, walking to a harvest festival, fell in with Lycidas, a goat-herd, who challenged Theocritus to a singing match. Lycidas' own song is a marvel of melodious grace :

... And he shall sing me how the big chest held  
(All through the maniac malice of his lord)  
A living goatherd : how the round-faced bees,  
Lured from their meadow by the cedar smell,



Fed him with daintiest flowers, because the Muse  
 Had made his lips a haunt of honeyed song.  
 Happy Cometes, this sweet lot was thine !  
 The chest thy lodging and the honeycomb  
 Thy meat, thou didst fulfil the natural year.  
 And oh hadst thou been numbered with the quick  
 In my day ! I had led thy pretty goats  
 About the hill-side, listening to thy voice :  
 While thou hadst lain thee down 'neath oak or pine,  
 Divine Cometes, warbling pleasantly.<sup>1</sup>

At the close is a description of the harvest festival, lines which murmur and drowse with the opulent fruits and scents of late summer. The Eighth Idyll contains a delicious stanza which provided Blackmore with a motto for *Lorna Doone*. In English it might run thus :

No wide domain, nor golden treasure,  
 Nor speed like wind across the lea,  
 I pray for : here I find my pleasure,  
 In this cliff-shade embracing thee,  
 My grazing sheep to watch at leisure,  
 And sing to yon Sicilian sea.

The Fisher-Idyll (xxi), not written by Theocritus, is saturated with the odours, sounds, and quiet emotions of the life led by two old fishermen in their poor hut by the tideless Mediterranean water. There is one marvellous line : 'Already have I seen a thousand dreams, but the dawn is not yet.'

Not all these idylls are pastoral. The Second depicts a girl seeking by spells and fierce incantations during the night to regain her lover :

Hushed are the voices of the winds and seas ;  
 But O not hushed the voice of my despair.  
 He burns my being up, who left me here  
 Unwifed, unmaidened, in my misery.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calverley.

The Fifteenth shows two women, about to set forth for the Adonis Festival in Alexandria, discussing clothes, husbands, servants, and housing with crispness and vigour. 'My dear, don't talk of your husband like that with the little one in the room. Look, woman, how he's staring at you! Never mind, Zopyrion, little pet: she doesn't mean Daddy.' Later come scenes in the crowded streets. 'Here's the Household Cavalry! Please, sir, don't trample on me! That bay horse is rearing. . . . Thank goodness I left the child at home!' The Twenty-eighth is a delightful letter accompanying an ivory distaff sent to the wife of a friend:

Lady of the Distaff she  
Shall be named, and oft reminded of her poet-friend by thee:  
Men shall look on thee and murmur to each other, 'Lo! how  
small  
Was the gift, and yet how precious! Friendship's gifts are price-  
less all.'<sup>1</sup>

Theocritus is the most original of the Alexandrians, but he is typical of the age in his erudition, his social feeling, and his preoccupation with art. His learning is not specially great; the point is that it forms part of his literary material—not always consciously paraded, but pervasive nevertheless. The wine at the harvest home he instinctively compares with the drink given by Odysseus to the Cyclops; in his account of Pentheus' death he imitates from Euripides a pun on the king's name; and his longest poems are miniature epics modelled upon Homer. The social feeling is that of the Hellenistic world: Theocritus is a cosmopolitan—it seems to matter little where he lives, in Sicily, Cos, or Alexandria, just as many modern novels might indifferently have been written in New York, Winchester, or Stockholm. But one cannot imagine Sophocles writing in Cyrene, any more than Smollett in Florence. The reason is that Alexander's conquests, having destroyed the Greek city-state as a spiritual entity, had

<sup>1</sup> Calverley.

enfranchised the individual. It is this last fact which accounts for the re-appearance of love as a material for literature after it had been largely held in abeyance by the Attic spirit: in the New Comedy and in men like Theocritus and Apollonius Rhodius love-stories and all that we mean by romance leap into importance because politics are now a matter for remote and professional governors. Lastly, Theocritus' preoccupation with art is a sign of his epoch. It is not only that he says much concerning the power of song, the sweetness of music: he admires virtuosity. And other arts attract him strongly. The wooden cup of the First Idyll has carvings to which the poet devotes a wealth of skilful enthusiasm (Sophocles in a similar connexion says simply 'the product of a dexterous man'); in the Fifteenth Idyll the wonders in Ptolemy's palace excite a rapture of admiration for manual cunning which extends even to the gingerbread animals. All these elements can be paralleled in earlier literature: the ivory distaff may remind us of Alcaeus' connoisseurship in dainty armour. But the perspective is different. Theocritus, despite his power, is a *littérateur*: one often feels that he values life as material for poems.

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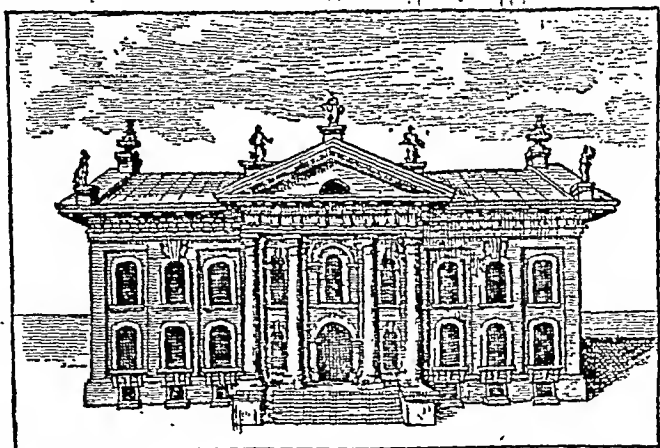
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